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WORLDS' ENDS

BY

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NOTE

WORLDS' ENDS is a translation of *Der unbekannte Gast*, one of the volumes in the series of fictions to which Wassermann has given the general title: *Der Wendekreis.* The title-story, *Der unbekannte Gast*, having already appeared in English in another volume, has not been included in Worlds' Ends.

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ADAM URBAS

Chief Justice Diesterweg, who died recently, was a shrewd, intelligent criminologist of the type of the great Anselm Feuerbach. It was in the papers he left that I came upon the following story:

Late one evening in October a Franconian peasant named Adam Urbas appeared at the police station in Gunzenhausen and declared that on that very day, in his native village of Aha, he had cut the throat of his eighteen-year-old son, Simon. The boy lay dead in his room at home. Adam had brought with him, and produced, the knife with which he had committed the crime. It was still stained with blood.

This confession, made in a calm voice and with the fewest possible details, was duly taken down by the police. Urbas refused to add another word and to answer the questions put by the Commissioner of Police. In the course of the night, an official inspection was made of the scene of the crime, and Urbas's deposition was found to be exact. His wife was at home, half mad with anguish and horror, surrounded by terrified farm-hands and dairy-maids.

Adam Urbas was locked up in the Ansbach jail.

I was then almost at the outset of my legal career and had been appointed, a few weeks earlier, to this district seat. I welcomed the occasion to sit as examining magistrate on this case.

In the beginning, the case seemed transparently

clear: a peasant, intellectually circumscribed by the ignorance and brutishness of his caste, had quite simply rid himself of a degenerate son who had brought upon him nothing but shame and grief; in this way he had executed just punishment upon the lad and averted the promise of further misery.

The witnesses testified unanimously that Simon had been an altogether worthless fellow, a loafer who would not go to work, and a constant frequenter of all the taverns and fairs of the countryside. His idle, disorderly mode of living had required a good deal of money, and when the money was not forthcoming from his terrorized mother (whether because she would not or could not give it to him), he found other ways to procure it. For example, in August he had gone to a Weissenburg grain merchant, one Kohn, had extracted from the man eight hundred marks in payment of barley delivered by his father, and then dissipated the entire sum. In Nordlingen a prostitute got him into her clutches and announced herself with child by him. One day he lured her into a deserted place and attempted to strangle her. Passers-by heard the woman's screams and rescued her. This affair was still under investigation when Adam Urbas exercised summary justice himself.

The testimony further revealed habits and characteristics of Simon's youth which displayed him in the worst possible light. His childhood was marked by a malicious and evil shrewdness of which no good ever transpired. Another example: one day the housemaid returned from town with six new linen shifts which she showed proudly to the farmer's wife. Vespers sounded, and the maid left the flower-white linen on the kitchen

table while she went to church. When she returned, the garments lay there, so smeared with axle-grease as to be forever unwearable. Nobody doubted that it was Simon who had done this, but proof was never forthcoming in this instance any more than in the affair with Scharf, the drayman. Scharf had left his flour-laden wagon standing before the tavern. When he started to drive on, the flour poured in a white stream along the road; some ten or twelve sacks had been slashed with a knife. Everybody knew it must have been Simon Urbas who had done this, yet there was no proof.

To his meanness and thieving, Simon later added cheekiness and brutality. All right-thinking people agreed that a poisonous weed was growing up, so high that no shears could reach its tip, and so firmly rooted, that no hoe was strong enough to dig it up. I did not really need more than a fraction of the evidence offered. There was here no problem at all, no complication, no mystery. So far as the dead lad was concerned, everything was clear, simple, pointing only in one direction.

The last act of this village tragedy opened at Gunzenhausen on a Sunday, during the county fair. Two peasants from Windbach had been sitting in the tavern at Aha, discussing the fact that a warrant had been issued for the arrest of Simon Urbas. They had not observed that Adam Urbas was seated at a neighboring table. The others in the taproom, landlord and guests, looked anxiously towards Adam and saw from the fashion in which he set down his glass and stood up from his bench that he had, until that moment, heard nothing of the Nordlingen episode. As a matter of fact, Simon's outrages were always withheld from the old man's knowledge as long as possible. His extraor-

dinary, silent demeanor, his dignified bearing, and not least of all, the great affection in which he was held in the community and indeed in the entire region, had contributed to the erection of a kind of protective wall about him. Moreover, through all these years his wife had managed to intercept the slightest bad news and soften its harshness before it reached his ears. But people were mistaken who imagined that he was ignorant of what went on, or shut his eyes voluntarily to half the truth. He knew just how to leave them in doubt about what he saw and what went on in his mind.

A chattering servant girl had told the farmer's wife, while she was churning butter, of the trouble in the air. When Urbas reached home, he moved over to a window so as not to be obliged to look into his wife's face. Evening had already fallen. Franz Schieferer, a bricklayer, came by. He called out to Urbas's wife that Simon was treating men and women to drink at the Hart Tavern in Gunzenhausen, and throwing money about in reckless fashion. Then he added with an excited laugh: "But they'll clap your bird in a cage soon. The police are on their way now." This, it turned out later, was not so; even the news that a warrant had been issued was merely a rumor.

All the servants had gone to the fair. The farmer's wife let herself sink down upon a bench against the wall. Urbas tramped heavily back and forth in the room. Soon they heard clumsy steps moving in from the road, and the ringing of the door bell. Fists pounded on the massive wood, to the accompaniment of curses. The woman sprang up and started out. Urbas raised his finger and pointed,—nothing more. She stopped on the threshold. Now Simon's face appeared at the

window, discolored with drink, an evil light in his eyes. His mother cried out and motioned him to go away. He vanished. There was silence for a time. Then noise in an adjoining room. Simon had come into the house through the farmyard door. It was dark, and he stumbled against the implements in the store-room. Something crashed. His mother tore open the door, and in the flood of lamplight she saw the drunken fellow raise himself heavily from the floor. He stretched out his arms towards his mother and father, and a stream of horrible language poured from his mouth. This was probably a decisive moment in Adam Urbas's life. His wife testified later that at that moment she had seen him shudder from head to foot.

Simon, meantime, had groped his way to his room. Roaring, he slammed the door behind him. There was silence again. Urbas started out into the threshing-shed. His wife stood behind him, her face buried in her apron. They remained thus for about five minutes. Then Urbas emerged and went across to the bedroom. Later, the farmer's wife said that she had realized and felt what was about to happen, but her limbs seemed frozen and she was powerless to stir. Whether Simon was so drunk that he slept from the moment he threw himself across the bed, or whether there was any conversation between father and son, could therefore not be learned. Once she said that all had remained silent, and then again that they had talked together, even for a fairly long time. Both doors, however, were shut, and since by her own statement she was seated in the chimney-corner, the sound of voices,—as was proved by numerous tests,—could not possibly have reached her. It is to be observed, also, that her evidence concerning

the length of time spent by Adam Urbas in his son's room was noticeably uncertain: once she said it could not have been more than fifteen minutes; another time, over an hour. The knife used had not belonged to Urbas but to his son. Whether the boy had carried it on his person, or whether it had been lying in the room was another detail which remained obscure. On this point, Urbas was obdurate in his silence, and, important as the circumstance was, no light was shed on it.

I must say that in the beginning, despite their extraordinary character, these incidents did not greatly interest me. They were the typical accompaniments of such a crime. The father, an inflexibly stubborn man, his peasant sense of honor outraged, his true peasant arrogance recognizing no justice higher than himself; the son, a scoundrel whose violent and untimely end one could scarcely deplore; the mother wavering between the two. It was the usual combination, and justice could take its course unhindered by obscurities.

Gradually, however, after careful scrutiny of the past and of Adam Urbas's character, my interest became more keen. Suppose yourself to be walking along a wall which seems like any other wall in the world. Suddenly, you become aware of faint markings on the wall. As the inscriptions grow gradually clearer, the temptation to decipher them becomes more and more irresistible. You begin to make out one group after another until in a flash you have a revelation of the secret realm lying behind that wall. Something of this sort was happening to me.

For thirteen years, Urbas and his wife were childless. She had accepted this fact as ineluctable destiny; Urbas, on the other hand, was rebellious of the decree

of nature. He was the last of an ancient line of peasants; the name Urbas appears in Franconian chronicles as early as the fourteenth century; to be without an heir seemed to him disgraceful. What was the good of the working and the saving? What was the good of a house filled with well-laden chests, of the cattle in their stalls, the grain in the barn, the fields, the meadows, the mill, the river, and the woodland?

But Urbas never complained, either to his wife or to others. His expression never changed when conversation turned on this subject. No hard word, no curt question came from him the year round.

But, once each month he would chance to look squarely at his wife, and from his eyes would emanate a force that would grow and wax independently of his will, to no apparent purpose. It might come over him in the fields: he would stop binding a sheaf of grain and gaze at his wife. Or the woman might waken in the night to find him propped up on his elbow, gazing at her. Or on the square before the church: she would stand talking with other women; suddenly she would become dumb, for there, three steps away, he would stand staring at her. Never any anger; never a threat; never a word of reproach; only a man who gazed searchingly at her, gazed long and silently, from under his shaggy eyebrows.

Once in every month it was expected to happen, was certain to happen. In the beginning, the woman remained unperturbed by what she took to be a mere vagary, whose meaning she need not bother to learn. She would laugh and try to say something cheerful. Then came a time when she would turn away, try to dismiss it from her mind. But there came hours, and

finally whole days, when she would ponder and wonder; and the question she dared not ask the peasant to his face, she would ask his haunting shadow.

She would brood over it. Can't people speak to one another? Why has he a tongue in his head, if not to speak his mind with? She decided to take the bull by the horns. Yet, when the moment came and she approached him, her courage evaporated. A sense of guilt grew in her; a voice clamored for speech; the moment for speech did not come. She felt that she was not guilty. Something was guilty, however, and that something was within her. The changing seasons and their varied activities forced the days back into their normal course, but the period of relief grew ever shorter. Dread of the peasant's steady glance paralyzed her thoughts, penetrating her as often as her beating blood signaled a deeper sense of guilt. From November to February, the walls and rafters of the house became more and more oppressive. The indoor air grew heavy; the sky came down against the window-panes; the evening clung like a wet sack about her body. Pale linen lay drying on the planks. The cows lay in a rosy steam, while in the path leading between the walls of snow to the byre, a lantern, swinging from the hand of a pregnant maid, sent forth wide rainbow-rings of light.

She was conscious only of two things: her body and her fear. Twenty-eight days and nights passed without distraction. Urbas sat beside the stove, his pipe between his teeth; went to the inn and returned in the evening; sat again beside the stove and studied the newspaper; stood up when the pot of cabbage and dumplings was brought in; said grace; listened quietly

while the others spoke. There was nothing secretive in his expression; no hint of gathering ill-will; only silence.

And then the moment would come! Already the woman felt it in her bones; she felt it at the roots of her hair. A door opened, and there he stood. In the morning; late at night. In the parlor; in the threshing-shed. There he stood with that unfathomable look. No clearing of the throat; no gesture; no word; only that look which said: Why not? Why all the others and not you, too? Why does your field lie barren?

Twelve years went by in this way, and then the woman's strength gave out. She became morose. In the night she tossed sleeplessly. Through the darkness burned the eyes of the peasant; though he might be asleep, she felt them on her. During the day, she would creep at the sound of his tread into a corner of the barn and crouch there trembling until calls for her would resound from every side. She relaxed her grip on the household; the servants grew slack.

She denied herself to him. She shuddered in his embrace. To her darkening senses it seemed that if she refused to give herself, the man could not demand anything of her. She grew cold at his touch and her blood ran chill. The woman in her froze. Then Urbas began to woo her, but in a new way, as she had never known him to woo before. Not with words did he woo, but rather with timid offerings. There was often a kind of agitation in his wooing, as if she had hidden herself away and he had to find her; as if he sought and was unable to find her. He was like a suffering animal. For a year or more, this went on. Gradually the woman lost her dread of him as she realized that she

was not, in his eyes, a mere down-trodden creature, to be fed and caressed when it has done his bidding, otherwise to be beaten; but that she meant something else to him, was worthy of his respect and esteem. She turned again to him with a willing heart. One month later she was with child.

When there was no further doubt about this, her being underwent a change. She moved about the house with youthful steps, drove the laggards at their work, took a hand in everything that went on, became talkative, gay, and blooming. Everybody was amazed. Even Urbas marveled. She did not wish to tell him point-blank what was in store; she wanted to make of it a festive occasion, for it was as if she were bringing him a precious gift. On Maundy Thursday, she donned her holiday dress and with it a long black head-dress fastened by silver clasps. Then she called Urbas upstairs into the room where, in their cupboards, stood the old silver and china, the heritage of centuries. She sat down solemnly in an arm-chair, folded her hands in her lap, and told him briefly and simply what there was to tell.

A shudder ran through Urbas's powerful body. When she spoke of this nineteen years later, picturing the scene and describing Urbas's shock, one could see that she was living over again the tremor of that moment. Urbas's earth-brown face became as red as a poppy. He let forth a roar of laughter. Then tears streamed from his eyes. He strode over to her and struck her so roughly on the shoulder that she cried out. Dismayed that she did not take as a caress what had been so intended, he stroked her back tenderly,

devoutly, while a melodious growl hummed like an organ-tone in his throat.

He ordered her peremptorily to be careful of herself. He went secretly to the doctor for advice. An extra serving maid was taken on to free his wife from all work. He would watch over her, spring up to remove things from her path. Sometimes, while the baby clothes were being sewn, he would sit by, staring with round eyes and nodding his heavy head. Events proceeded in their natural course, and the hour of birth arrived. For a long time, Urbas held in his arms the new-born babe, gazing at the puny, ill-favored mass with mingled feelings of joy and apprehension.

Simon grew up as other peasant children do. Nothing was made easier for him. He was not allowed to learn how long and impatiently he had been awaited. What he was worth to his people had to be proved by his industry. Childhood displays of temper were dashed against the unyielding order of things; childhood illnesses were merely trials which served to answer the question: Are you worthy or unworthy? Throughout, a sharp observer might have perceived in Urbas a restless suspense, as though he were listening to the very pulse-beat in the boy's body. This look of strained attentiveness remained in his features. It etched lines into his face. However much he might seem unobservant of Simon's words and movements, such seeming was false. None about him could measure how accurately he saw everything that occurred. Eventually, I learned the truth, learned it in a way never to be forgotten, or, in fact, to be explained in words, which are the only means at my disposal.

An almost exalted conception of the ideal relations

between father and son was fused with Urbas's very being. He knew himself a peasant, which is to say a king. The earth was his earth; the farm-hand his farm-hand. The seasons were made for him, for his fields, his harvests. He was lord over the land. His eye fixed its limits to the very boundary stone which had lain undisturbed since ancient times. No blade of grass came up but in his name. Property was of all things most sacred, and property implied a master who would guard it vigilantly and inexorably, down to the last penny, the last grain of wheat. A son took it over from his father; a father passed it on to his son. Through the ages. This was the natural order of things; any other kind of world was unthinkable.

But I am getting ahead of my story and losing its thread.

The formal examination of Urbas, which it was my duty to make, revealed nothing of significance. His answers never varied, and he seemed fatigued and mystified by the need for repetition. He confined himself to the bare fact and would explain nothing. He scorned any defense, refused to hear of legal counsel, and was stubbornly indifferent to my advice and suggestions. When I pointed out that a voluntary declaration of the motive of his crime would result in a considerably mitigated sentence, he answered laconically: "That is beside the point." I made up my mind to give up this fruitless questioning, especially since the testimony of the witnesses, added to what I had learned about the victim and the accused, seemed to me to have forged an unbroken chain of motives.

Nevertheless, there were two details upon which no light had been thrown. One was the coroner's testi-

mony to the effect that the body showed not the slightest trace of violence, either in the position of the stiffened limbs and the state of the clothing, or in the facial expression of the deceased. Had the peasant not accused himself, it would have been difficult to prove murder. The second debatable point concerned the undisputed fact that the knife had belonged to Simon Urbas. The peasant asserted that it had been sticking in Simon's belt, and that he had simply drawn it out. Even to this statement he committed himself only after continued pressure had been exercized. This had so patent an air of improbability that he retracted it the following day, saying the knife had lain open on a table, that Simon had cut bread with it that same morning. When I expressed surprise about his uncertainty on so important a point, he lowered his glance with some embarrassment. It was the only time I thought he seemed disconcerted in any way.

To bring that silent tongue to speak became a compelling urge in me. I thought of him almost uninterruptedly. The patent clarity of the case, and the obstinacy with which it haunted me, perturbed and annoyed me. Over and over a voice in me said: This man is no murderer. This is not the kind of man who cuts a human throat as casually as if he were slaughtering a [illegible]en; who makes himself the horrible, brutal executioner of his own son. Yet, he had confessed the deed! What had really happened? Regarding the length of time spent in the room, he had remained silent, or at most had shrugged his shoulders. It was only during the final examination that he confessed reluctantly that he might have been in the room a half

hour. What took place in that half hour? He had guessed my thought, and his brow had clouded.

I saw that the only way I could put an end to my intolerable obsession would be to put off my professional attitude and confront him man to man. It seemed to me I had won his confidence in a certain degree. I had tried to deal delicately with such disagreeable points as arose from time to time, and in these moments I had a sense of his gratitude. For a while I hesitated, fearing that his innately suspicious nature would arise to rebuff an intruder from a foreign sphere. I wondered, too, whether there existed a common ground on which our different natures could meet. But the thought of him drove such doubts from my mind. Adam Urbas was no ordinary peasant. He belonged to our peasant aristocracy; his very bearing betrayed intelligence and character. I hoped, therefore, that my approach would not be made in vain. I weighed the matter no longer. One evening in December I walked into the prison and entered Urbas's cell.

I had seen to his comfort during his custody. The cell was a livable place, decently furnished with washstand, bed, and mirror, and adequately heated. He was sitting with an open Bible before him in the light of a lamp. I greeted him, took off my coat, hung it on a peg, seated myself opposite him at the table.

Each time I saw him, his appearance struck me afresh. It did so now. He was as massive as a bull. He had the round, brachycephalic head of the true native Franconian, but the skull, particularly in the formation of the temples, showed signs of ancient breeding; the bones there were strikingly thin, and the skin

was bluish-yellow and nearly transparent. His mouth was broad, with thin firm lips; his nose aquiline and high-bridged. His carefully shaven face might have been that of an old actor. His hands were the hands of a giant. His heavy-lidded eyes rarely opened more than a crack, but when they were wide open their gaze was amazingly piercing and difficult even for me to sustain.

By way of creating an opening, I said that I had long felt the need of coming to see him. However, I had not come in my official capacity, but rather,—if he had no objection,—as a friend who happened to be privileged to visit him. As a matter of fact, he was my ward, and I was responsible for his well-being.

He looked at me in silence. After a time he said: "Very good of you."

I made a gesture of protest. "That is not how I should like you to receive me," I said. "I hope that you will cease to mistrust me now. One is naturally suspicious of a judge on the bench. You say to yourself: 'If he is not here officially, to complete his depositions, then he is here out of curiosity, to pry into my affairs.' Neither is true. The papers are practically all prepared. We are ready now for the trial. I have little reason to be curious, for it seems to me I have learned all there is to know. Why I have come, I scarcely know myself. I had to come. It seemed to me my duty."

Again Urbas was silent for a long time. At last he spoke: "I believe you."

I grasped at the thread. "If you believe me," I said, "we can talk in peace about what has happened, like two old acquaintances."

Urbas reflected. Then he said: "What is the use of saying anything? Bad enough that it had to happen."

"That is just the question," I exclaimed. "Did it have to happen? Have to?"

He raised his head, but his glance remained lowered. "To doubt that would be sheer foolhardiness," he said.

"Not only does a doubt exist," I persisted, "but society rejects your deed and abhors it. If every man were to mete out justice in these cases according to his own lights, there would be no end of horrors, and we should live surrounded by savage beasts. How you plan to justify your deed to yourself and your highest Judge, I do not know. But you are still answerable to society."

Urbas shook his head. "What can talking do or undo?" he murmured indifferently.

I said: "The slate must be wiped clean between you and society. So long as you continue your obdurate silence, the horror and the confusion remain."

"But what if a man lacks words to explain?"

"Does he lack them, or merely withhold them out of pride and stubbornness?" I retorted. "Look into yourself!"

He said: "My tongue is clumsy. I am unaccustomed to speech." He wrinkled his forehead. I saw that I could press him no further. I waited. At last a rumble awoke in his breast: "I made him." His gaze dropped. "May I not also exterminate him?" he added with a strange, crafty expression. "You may all contest that as much as you like: that which a man has made he may also exterminate, if it was only to do evil that the thing was made. I went after him myself; dug him out of his mother's womb. Other women carry

their fruit nine months. Of his mother it is true to say she carried him thirteen years. I insisted that she bear him; I insisted that God send him. I determined everything about him before he was born. He shall be this to me, and this, I said to myself. Like a lump of clay you dig up out of the earth and mold and knead to your liking. Suddenly you see that you are holding mere mud in your hand. You throw it down on the earth out of which it came."

The crafty expression deepened. He scrutinized me through half-closed eyes. "It was only little by little that you learned he was doomed to evil," I suggested.

He interrupted me with an imperious gesture. "Bad from the beginning. Bad blood; I smelt it with my nose. Others, with far worse antecedents, grow up without much looking after and do not turn out wrong. They may bend themselves crooked in the beginning, but time straightens them out. With him, the crooked grew ever crookeder. Then I saw that much wrong would ensue. And so it was. Every day a grain of sand; finally, a mountain. There I stood, asking myself: 'How will this end?' When you rooted it up in one place, it grew twice as high in another. When you sought to grasp it in your hand, it slipped through your fingers. There was no help for it."

"But cannot defective seeds be made to thrive through careful cultivation?" I asked. "Did you try to awaken his conscience? Did you try seriously to teach him?"

For the first time, Urbas raised his heavy lids. He looked dazed. "Sir," he said abruptly, "one cannot command the elements. I said to myself: 'If the eye cannot see, then the tongue cannot help it to sight.

If example does not suffice, then neither will the rod.' So far as speech goes, my wife did her duty. Women understand these things better. If he could not hear my voice speaking in hers, what good was it to him? If he could not hear what I, without speaking, gave him to understand, then the words of the prophet, even, would have been vain sounds to him. This I told myself. When I led, he could have followed. When I followed him, he could have turned round. He never saw me; he never heard me. It would go against my grain to seize a person and shout in his ear: 'Man! be decent!' What would be the use, if decency were not in his nature? The man who makes a scornful face while others pray is a lost creature. Punishment avails only where the worm is not already gnawing at the root."

"Were you really certain of all this?" I asked, not without some diffidence, for his words and his voice rang with a sinister conviction. "Were you so firmly convinced of your own infallibility?"

He stretched his arm across the table. His breath came heavily as he answered me. "If my flesh and blood rises up against me can I dispute with it as with a cheating tradesman? If the seed I sowed brings forth a brood of hissing vipers can I, like a schoolmaster, go for them with a rod? There would be neither sense nor dignity in that. If the person on whom you have staked your whole future is a creature of evil, and causes nothing but evil, incessant evil, until house and farm are engulfed in slime, what are you to do? Can you break his bones and hope they'll grow another way? or breathe into him another brain and heart?"

His powerful face trembled and blazed. This man, who for so long,—a life-time, no doubt,—had confided in no one, was baring his soul before my eyes, finding words, images, and tones with which to awe and silence me. But I had suddenly the unshakable impression that he was talking to me, turning towards me, only in appearance; that in reality he was trying to ward off an unseen assailant, whose questions and reproaches he was not now hearing for the first time. It seemed to me that what he was telling me had long been fermenting in him, and was now gushing forth, pouring itself out; while he, unable to control the rush of his own terribly constrained and oppressive words, stood helplessly by, listening mutely in rage and pain to the sound of his own voice.

With bowed head and squared jaw, he went on, his voice growing more tranquil. "You might ask, 'When did you first realize? When did your hope end?' Ask the leper when he first realized that his skin was beginning to fester. He knew it, of course, on the first day; but he only believed it when his leprosy forced him to take to bed. Night after night, I lay thinking and thinking. Thought about myself; thought about him. Weighed this, and weighed that. Watched and watched the leprosy eating its way in. Tortured my spirit with wondering how to fight this evil. Discipline? Discipline is always one step behind, the misdeed always one step ahead. The club with which I might have beaten him would have splintered in my fist, and the welts on his back would merely have calloused him. Ought I to have laid down rules? What kind of rules? Where are the infallible ones? Should I have chained him up like a dog? Everything in him

that I fastened on was myself. I the tree, he the branch; I the wick, he the flame; I the earth, he the spring. How can the tree quarrel with the branch? The same sap runs through them. And the wick with the flame it nourishes? The earth with the spring that gushes forth from it? So much is true; but whence came this evil? There it is, spreading like a prairie-fire. But where does it come from? How cruelly it advances! First the petty lie, then the serious one; first the penny filched, then the pound; first the beast maltreated, then the human being; first the pocket picked, then all honor gone; first a rogue, then a procurer. No respect, no faith, no honesty, no love. Where did it all come from? From me? Obviously. And then I asked myself: Where, Urbas, and when, were your body and soul so scorched in Hell that you should bring forth such stench and foulness into the world? Is it possible that man is merely filth and vileness, reproducing only filth and vileness in his turn?"

He looked at me with his stolid gaze, like a beast of burden panting under its load. There was silence once more. With his coat-sleeve he wiped the moisture from his brow. I sympathized with his anguish; I shared it; but something in me that would not be silenced accused him of exaggeration. "It seems to me that you take upon yourself more responsibility than any man has the right to assume," I began. "When you exaggerate your notion of duty, you are bound to exaggerate your idea of the rights you possess. You have, as man and as father, been thinking only of yourself. But what about the boy's mother, who has an equal, or even a greater, claim on her son? She will not sanction your

reasoning, and even less the violent act which tore all family ties asunder."

"That is something we cannot discuss," Urbas answered coldly. "We have gone beyond the realm of reason. Whether she approves of my reasons I do not know. She has lost something, and so have I. Her suffering is great, but my damnation is greater. She has nothing left in life, but my life has been poisoned for many a year. Certainly, she deserves more pity than I. Her body seemed to give forth its fruit reluctantly; it has revenged itself upon my pride and my folly. Men ought merely to seek to understand nature; instead, we defy her, try to improve upon her, and butt like steers against the bolted door. No woman should have only one child; too much depends on it. My mother had nine. To be sure, seven of them died. My grandmother had sixteen, and of them also eight were early taken by death. There is nothing bitter about such death. Not all the seeds sown in the fields bring forth grain. One should never have an only child; the risk is too great. It is a lottery. No; the analogy is bad, for here we are dealing with a scorching flame that is blown back upon us and leaves its scars. A mother is doubtless fearful when her only offering is rejected by God and man, and her soul is filled with sorrow. She is his in time and eternity, so that even if he came towards her with uplifted axe, his life would still seem to her worth more than her own. To her, good and evil are meaningless; blood speaks in a louder voice than they.

"As for me, 'Father!' it cried out to me. What does 'Father!' mean, I have wondered, striving to learn its deepest sense. Had I bedded with a serving-maid

and begotten a son, he also would have called me father. Would it have been the same? It would not. He might have been decent, respectful, the son I desired. Why not have begotten him, then? Why the indecent one? But the law forbids, and the law is sacred. And would that servant have been my wife? Let me say this: a man's aspirations are both higher and deeper than a woman's. And I will say this, too, that a father's guilt goes deeper than a mother's. A mother sits at the hem of our Lord's robe, and He will not let harm befall her. A father is called before the Seat and a reckoning demanded from him. He is the central link in the chain of his race, the link between his forebears and his descendants. He may not surrender to tenderness and caresses, for through the eyes of his son, his community, his king, his ancestors, and all who come after him unto the fourth and the fifth generation, are watching him. The son is loaned to him as a kind of pledge, to be given back to the world when the time is ripe. Woe unto him who must come forward with empty hands and says: 'I have betrayed my trust!' "

He looked fixedly into space, rose from his chair, and repeated: "I have betrayed my trust!" Then he sat down again.

I dared not break in upon his absorption. Besides, I was seeking in my mind a way that would lead us farther on. From one moment to the next I felt more sure of my theory, but I was afraid. My certainty was such that conclusions which, until now, had been founded on mere assumption and circumstantial evidence, took on the bright colors of reality. One picture fitted into another with prophetic clearness.

Undoubtedly the personal magnetism of the man seated opposite me contributed both to my vision and my fear. Despite a long career as lawyer and judge,—or, rather, because of it,—I have had too much experience of extraordinary telepathic communication to ridicule the idea of the transference of mental states.

There was something solemnly impressive about this man. To rob him of his secret seemed to me almost dishonorable. I trembled. I could not find the proper opening. Finally, however, breaking the deep silence, I leaned far across the table and asked him: "And did you go into that room intending to end it all?"

He did not answer. The firm lips refused to open. But the obstinate forehead burst open to my gaze. It opened like a book and I was able to read all that lay behind it.

"You went into that room twice," I said suddenly at a venture,—or perhaps not at a venture; perhaps my words were dictated by the burning inspiration of the moment. "Twice!" I went on. "And when you left the first time, Simon was still alive. When you went in the second time, he was already lying on the bed, a corpse!"

I should never have thought that this peasant's face, normally as brown as stained wood, could grow so white. The pallor seemed to flow visibly out of his pores, coating his skin with a shimmer as of wet chalk. He stared at me with wide open eyes; his cheeks quivered; he clutched at his throat with both hands. My uncertainty vanished. I forced myself to speak calmly, and continued: "You went in to take him some money. You had none in the house on that Sunday, and borrowed, directly after dinner, two thousand

marks from your neighbor, Stephen Buchner. Isn't that so? You were to rid yourself with this money of Simon. He was to reach a seaport that same evening and take ship to America. Isn't that so? You offered him the money; you explained your plan; and you expected him to obey without hesitation. But not only did he refuse to obey; he also refused the money. You questioned him, and then he began to speak. At first, what he said was confused and incoherent, for he was still befuddled with drink. Later, though, his words became clear to you, terribly clear. You stood before him and said not a word. You were not even offended at his lying on the bed and speaking into the air, for you knew if he had to look you in the face, he would never have the courage to speak out. You listened, simply listened, and out of the listening arose all that happened later. Is that so or not?"

Urbas did not take his frightened gaze from my face. "You must have been a ghostly presence in the house," he stammered in his bewilderment.

"No," I said. "There are simple conclusions drawn from verifiable facts. The most insignificant facts often leave behind them the most telling traces. There is no witchery or magic about this. Nature has ruled that a man's actions shall always form links in an unbroken chain. It is as if you threw a stone into a pool: the ripples widen and vanish, but the vibration may still be felt long after the eye has ceased to detect anything. Thus there is really no escape from the net of circumstance, which draws more closely about a man with each step taken, each touch of a finger, each exhalation of a breath. I had one clue to which in the beginning I attached little value; only as time passed

did I become aware of its significance. Suddenly it clarified the whole situation. In Eichstadt lives a painter named Kiessling. He was a friend and boon companion of Simon. The fellow is a ne'er-do-well who has come down in the world, but is not without a crude kind of uprightness. He had a number of things to tell me. For instance: you will recall that last winter one of your antique, beautifully painted china jugs disappeared. You and your wife felt certain that Simon had abstracted it and sold it to a dealer in town, for it was a valuable piece. Your wife went so far as to express the suspicion that Kiessling had served as go-between in its disposal. Simon did, as a matter of fact, take the jug. It is also true that Kiessling had a hand in the affair, and that he would not have been above sharing in the proceeds, although he now denies this. But things never went as far as that. Simon smashed the jug before the eyes of his friend. They were in the little shop on the Pleinfeld road. Simon had brought the jug. Kiessling held it in his hands, and was inspecting it expertly with approval, when Simon wrenched it from his grasp and dashed it with all his might to the ground, where, naturally, it broke into a hundred bits. Kiessling remonstrated angrily with him, but Simon, after brooding morosely for a moment, cried out of a sudden: 'I should like to do something that would really hurt him, something he would feel in the very marrow of his bones!' Kiessling could not guess immediately against whom this rage was directed. His acquaintance with Simon was then still fresh. Later, he realized who was meant. He said he had never seen a son possessed of such a hatred for his father. Similar outbursts succeeded one an-

other from time to time. An impotent bitterness would come over Simon, an urge to destroy. These spells would alternate with a morbid joylessness, a clouded melancholy during which time he would brood silently. Often what he seemed to feel was not hate but fear; often not fear but something more unfathomable. Other people have testified that at various times he had been heard to say something like this: 'I wish I could tell him everything right out to his face, just once; then I'd feel better.' What could he have meant by this? Kiessling was not alone to speak in his favor; there were others who said he was not really wicked, at bottom, and most of these were people who had no reason to speak for him. They described him as weak-willed, easily led astray, unstable, dissipating in order to numb himself, evading work like a man hunted and constantly in flight, vicious through heartsickness, but not fundamentally bad. This is the way I see him now myself. But by whom, exactly, did he feel himself hunted? Whom was he defying? What was he trying to numb within himself? It seems to me, Urbas, that you and I know the answers. Though the whole world cudgel its brains, we two know the truth. But you did not know it until that evening in the bedroom. You learned it then."

Urbas drew a long breath of relief. His face twitched as if he were wincing at blows from within. Apparently he was trying to summon words that would not come. But the lights and shadows in his bony, sensitive, honorable countenance were sufficiently eloquent. The gloomy amazement, the almost superstitious horror he had felt at the unveiling of what he had regarded as his inviolable, eternally buried secret,

was gone. Now that he had no longer to guard his secret, his heart was relieved of a heavy burden. And so he sighed deeply with relief.

I felt it my duty to help him through the last remaining difficulties, and went on. "If you look at it properly, you see that men are worse off in these matters than animals. Animals cannot misunderstand one another. Men misunderstand one another continually in deed and in thought; this is true of brothers, of friends, of fathers and sons. Each man dwells at the center of his own incomprehension as in a black cave, and suffers from the extravagant delusion that his cave is a brilliantly lighted room. And the man who imagines that God has been at particular pains to select him as His mouthpiece on earth soon discovers that he has been the instrument of Satan. For thirteen years your only thought was to have a son, and after he came it took you eighteen years to discover what your son was like; and then it was too late. Is not human wisdom a pretty sad thing? Why then, Urbas, should you go on assuming responsibility for a crime you did not commit? Why call yourself the murderer of him who chose his own way out of the world? Why do you insist upon cheating earthly justice? Why, man! Why?"

"I'll tell you the reason," said Urbas, "now that my game is completely up. But have patience with me; it is difficult." He seemed to be searching within himself; his fingers twitched as if they too were seeking, with his thoughts, the most precise, the briefest word, the most truthworthy explanation. He began fumblingly: "It is true that I went in to give him the money. I had not thought of America. Get him away, I said

to myself, as quickly as possible, as far as possible, and be spared, at least the sight of policemen in the house. I crossed over to the room. It was dark when I entered, and I had to light a candle. There he was, lying on the bed and staring at me. It is true that he did not accept the money. He turned his face to the wall, gritted his teeth, and said that money could no longer help him. I stood beside the bed and said: 'Stand up in your father's presence!' He answered: 'Why should I stand in your presence when it is you who have flung me down?' My fists clenched of themselves and I said: 'What do you mean? How have I flung you down, you scoundrel!' A single word came from his lips: 'You—!' Nothing else. 'You—!' he said. I looked at him; he stared back at me; and after a pause he repeated: 'You—!' In that word was so much spite and fury and venom, such a convulsive threat, that the saliva turned bitter in my mouth. 'What do you mean by *you*,' I cried; 'What do you mean by *you?*' 'Oh . . . you—!' he said again between clenched teeth; 'the weight of you has been crushing down my chest from the day I was born.' I was silent. 'Go on standing there and glaring at me with those eyes of yours,' he went on. 'Is there never to be an end to your staring at me with those eyes? From the very first minute of my life it has been like this; you staring, staring, staring, saying never a word. Sitting at table, knowing everything there is to know about me, and never a word. A fine long road you have driven me with your staring and staring. Why have you never called me by name and spoken to me? Why have I never had a word out of you? Small wonder I went to the dogs! Small wonder I turned to carousing and

sought my pals in taverns. At least they speak, they laugh, they have a good word for a fellow. At least they say Whoa and Giddap, and you know where you stand with them. But you! Have I ever known where I stood with you? I used to say to myself: There he is, lying in wait again. He's after you again about something. When I was just a kid, if you came and stood in the doorway, whatever I was eating would stick in my throat. Hundreds and hundreds of times I have wanted to go to you, but I was afraid to take a step in your direction. I used to wonder what I had done that was wrong, and when I did something wrong I was happy, for then at least I knew *that*. And so I would be restless and nervous until I did something irreparable and aroused people's anger. Yes, I am bad, but I don't know that I was born that way. Yes, I am a scoundrel, but that is no reason why you need play the Lord almighty with me. You ought to be worrying about how you failed in your duty towards me. I might have honored you, as it says in the Ten Commandments; I might have been as tame as a starling. I could have done it; it was in me; but you drove it out. I have become a scoundrel and I am sick of life and I am sick of human beings and boon companions, and nothing gives me pleasure any more.' He went on that way and said several other things which I have forgotten. Then he rolled over on the bed, ground his teeth, and whimpered. He laughed angrily, turned once more to the wall and fell silent again. I said to myself: Urbas, there is a soul gone to perdition, but yours is probably damned, too. But I could not utter a word. I was tongue-tied. What good would it have done to go whining to my Maker? I

could not utter a word. I went out. I walked across the farmyard as far as the hedge. Everything was bathed in peace as on spring nights when the roots in the earth run with sap. I looked up to the stars. No help there. I opened the stable door and sniffed the warm acrid air. One of the oxen raised its head and went on chewing its cud. Suddenly I was seized with horror and thought: You must go back into that room; even if words don't come to you, something must be done. I went back. When I entered the room he was already lying in his blood. I stood still a long while. Then I said to myself: If this is what he has come to, then you are his murderer. If this is his charge against you, you must pay it. . . . Now I have told you everything."

He folded his hands over the Bible and then, in a milder tone and with a curiously veiled glance, he went on: "I want to tell you also about a dream I had the night before this happened. A farm-hand stepped into the room and said: 'Farmer, the horses are harnessed. Let us start.' I went out where the horses stood waiting in the deep snow, and got in to drive the wagon. All at once we were off the road and the horses were wading in snow up to their bellies. Suddenly I turned around and there was the farm burning behind me, casting a red glow over the snow. The horses began to run, dragging me along beside them by the reins. I was losing my breath. I could not loose the reins. They were wound round my hand. We came down towards the old mill by the railway bridge, where the water is sixty ells across and more than ten deep. There the horses ran on still more wildly while the glowing blaze filled the whole sky. The river was

frozen over and I wondered fearfully if the ice would bear the weight of wagon and horses. The horses—heavy farm horses—rushed down the bank, but the ice held firm. On the opposite bank stood Simon, and as the horses raced over their frozen course I shouted across to him: 'Help, Simon!' He answered: 'I have to go home; the house is burning; the stable is burning.' I could not swing myself back onto the wagon. The horses were dragging me along. I cried out in great distress: 'Help, Simon! Come and loose the reins!' He answered: 'You will have to loose them yourself. The ice will not hold the two of us.' Then I shouted to him: 'I'll give you everything for your own—horses, wagon, everything; but help, for God's sake!' He turned back towards me, and as he turned the horses stopped. But at the first step Simon took the ice cracked, and as he seized the horses' bridle the ice broke, and wagon, horses, Simon, and I sank into the water. I was sinking when I awoke."

He was silent. He expected no comment from me, and I had none to make. I saw with astonishment how in the course of a few minutes he had aged: his chin was sharp, his eyes were dull, his neck was thin, his hands had grown flabby, and his carriage was that of a feeble old man. The dominating, clear-headed, powerful man who had sat across from me had suddenly shriveled. When I took my leave he did not look up; he scarcely seemed to notice my going. The silence in which the whole of his former life had been wrapped spread itself once more about him, impenetrable, flowing into death. For, the next morning, when he was to have been arraigned, the jailer found him hanging from the window-beam.

GOLOVIN

The trip from Tula to the Caucasus had taken half the month of May. On the seventeenth Maria von Krüdener arrived in Kislovodsk, where she hoped to find a trace of her husband. On the outbreak of the revolution he had escaped to the Anglo-Russian front in Persia. It was five months since she had last had word of him.

Not far from Kislovodsk lay the estate of his brother, who was marshal of nobility. Alexander had proposed to send word through him if all other lines of communication failed.

Accompanied by her four children and three maid servants, she took an apartment in the Palace Hotel. The youngest child was still at the breast; she nursed it herself. It had been born three months after Alexander's departure. Though she might never before have grasped the meaning of a pledge between them, she understood it now.

The immense mountain range was depressing. She could take no delight in it; it was too like a wall, like one wall and then another rising into the eternal snows. Escape from this place seemed unthinkable. The immediate past was a horror at the thought of which her blood still grew cold. The first night she dreamt of fists, a mob of fists, all raised against her, staring at her with murderous eyes. The cut was still in her arm to remind her of the scene in the railway compartment, when a group of soldiers, drunk, had shattered the window. Eight people had been penned up in that

compartment together with mountains of baggage representing everything they had been able to take away with them from Tula. The children had screamed when two soldiers tore breathlessly at the door while others, shouting, followed them in. Dymow had gone into the next carriage to find a corner where he could at last snatch an hour or so of sleep. Maria was the first to be slashed; she was bleeding when she stepped forward towards the men. To their own astonishment they retreated and timidly lowered their eyes, as if a supernatural force emanated from her. Indeed, it seemed to her at the moment that she actually did possess a kind of secret magic.

And yet she would have been lost without Dymow. Ivan Dymow had been a court clerk. This common man of the people had been suddenly pushed upward by the revolution; he had acquired power and had not abused it. Maria, as mistress of the estate to which he was attached, had shown him many kindnesses, and had helped his wife through an illness. She had quite forgotten him, but in the hour of danger he turned up of his own accord. He procured passports, bribed the Soldiers' Council, managed to divert the suspicion of the peasants, to whom their mistress represented a valuable hostage. He cleared away all the difficulties of the escape, played spy, watchman, porter, guarantor, and was throughout uniformly and silently respectful. When he took leave of her at Kislovodsk she asked him with emotion how she could show her gratitude and prove her sense of indebtedness to him. He answered: "I shall deem myself happy, Maria Yakovlevna, if you will write occasionally to let me know how you and your children fare."

Was not that also part and parcel of her magic?

As a lady of the highest society, an officer's wife, the bearer of a celebrated name, she was received by the guests of the hotel with open arms. She was treated with special distinction, although it was known that she was of German origin and a Russian only by marriage.

Once more, after long forbearance, she was among people of her class, in the world of pleasure and class distinctions which had formerly seemed to her so agreeable and so desirable. But soon she realized that only the most superficial ties bound her to this life. Years spent on the estate, first with Alexander, and then, although alone, at least under his guidance, had accustomed her to another mode of life and to other ways of employing her time. Here nobody could keep to his own sphere; the elements were dangerously mixed, and inescapably so since a common fate urged them to cohere. The hotel, the town itself, once the show-place of the utmost luxury and the rendezvous of the aristocracy, was now like a lonely island harboring shipwrecked fugitives and the remnants of their belongings and of ultimate hopes. Grand Dukes and Imperial Chamberlains elbowed profiteers and journalists; women of the most exclusive Moscow and Petersburg circles shouldered kept women and shopkeepers' wives grown rich through the war. They had escaped Hell, but they knew well enough that they had merely been granted a short respite. They shuddered at the thought of the future, yet they reveled and feasted. News came to them of the execution of their fathers, their brothers or their friends, but they stupefied their emotions by gambling and dancing.

Maria's first move was to find a trustworthy man

whom she could send with a letter to her brother-in-law's estate. She was overjoyed to learn that Josef Menasse was in Kislovodsk. He had heard by chance of her arrival, and came to place himself at her disposal. Menasse was the managing clerk of a big bank in Odessa with which Alexander von Krüdener had transacted business.

As she remembered having heard Alexander praise Menasse's integrity from time to time, her trust in him was implicit and was not later to be shaken. He was violent in complaint of his own misfortune. Several weeks before, he had come here on important business; on the day of his intended departure train service was suspended, and any attempt now to leave must be made at the risk of one's life. Maria listened sympathetically, and said nothing of her own difficulties until he had unburdened himself. He reflected for a moment, said he would look around, and returned three hours later with a Circassian woman whom he recommended curtly and categorically as the person to undertake the errand.

The marshal had sternly disapproved of Alexander's marriage to Maria, and this had led to the rupture of relations between the two brothers. The elder brother had continued irreconcilable. He had stubbornly refused to meet Maria and had never acknowledged the successive announcements of the birth of the children. Alexander had borne his pettishness without grumbling and had not allowed Maria to express any indignation over it. He bowed before his brother as before a superior whose actions and decisions were above criticism. He bowed, and with that the subject was closed for Maria and for himself. At the outbreak of

the war, the marshal had written privately to his Master, the Czar, resigning all his offices and honors, and giving as his reason his conviction that the war with Germany would lead to a disaster for Russia. Thanks to his magnificent conduct during the Russo-Japanese War, his resignation was not misconstrued. He had since lived in complete retirement, and, as a passionate Hegelian, spent much of his time in the study of philosophy.

Maria gave little heed to the way people treated her, so long as she for her part was able to enjoy or admire them. Dignity and virtue, Alexander had taught her, were more to be prized than hollow congeniality. He had proved to her in many nights of conversation that the principle of retaliation was the source of all evil. She owed to his teaching the spiritual steadfastness that characterized her. Her letter to the marshal was a masterpiece of unaffected good-will.

And thus she waited for news or a sign of life from Alexander, with a premonition meanwhile that she was waiting in vain. To fill her time, she began herself to give lessons to Mitya, her eldest son, who was seven. But she soon discovered that the boy's eagerness was beyond her strength, and looked about for a tutor. An acquaintance from Moscow gave her the name of a student, Yefim Leontovitch Tatianov, who lived in a modest inn on the outskirts of the city. She sent for him and engaged him. He had been traveling as clerk or secretary to a manufacturer; in the course of their journey the man and most of his suite had been murdered by a band of soldiers. Yefim Leontovitch was stranded and destitute in this place of abundance. Maria treated him with consideration, which seemed to

him a new experience, for there was something childlike in his gratitude. He came not only at the appointed hours, but devoted all his free time to his pupil, and his simplicity and kindness endeared him to the two smaller boys, Fedya and Alyosha, as well as to Mitya.

One morning, Alyosha, hurrying on ahead of his mother, ran into the wrong room. Maria followed him in, laughing. She found him with a tall, stately lady, who came forward and held out her hand. It was the Princess Nelidov. Maria was suddenly embarrassed by her laughter, because the Princess was in deep mourning and Maria knew the cause. Her son, the twenty-three-year old Prince Grigoryi, an officer in the Imperial Navy, had recently shot himself during an excursion in the mountains.

The Princess, a woman in her forties, was still very beautiful. She was most cordial to Maria. She had known Alexander von Krüdener in the days when he had been attached to the Ministry, and spoke warmly of him. "Your presence does me good," the Princess said; "I hope we shall see each other often." She put her arm about Alyosha and stroked his hair. "We are holding the funeral supper for Grigoryi to-night," she went on; "do come; do come to me."

Maria was filled with pity, not only for the Princess and her particular sorrow, but for all these people. Her heart went out especially to the women; these thoughtless, brilliant creatures, made for luxury and happiness, seemed to her doomed.

She started to leave but the Princess detained her and sent Alyosha away. "Let me tell you," she said, "what has happened. There is a person here, living in this hotel, a certain Lisaveta Petrovna, who claims to

have been married to Grigoryi. She insists that they were married shortly before he left Sebastopol. She has no papers of any kind, no letters; her explanation is that her papers were stolen. She threw herself at my feet, kissed my hands, and called me mother. She sits up in her room all day long, crying and sobbing. From time to time she sends me notes by the servants: Have mercy, Princess; have mercy upon your Lisaveta Petrovna; have mercy! I do not know the woman. I know nothing about her. Grigoryi never mentioned her to me. It is impossible to learn if what she says is true. What am I to do? She wants me to be merciful; but how am I to be merciful? Probably she has no money; well, her account here will be settled. Yesterday she made a terrible scene. She came in, sat down with the others, and began to cry. My niece, Helena, stood up and called her a liar. Lisaveta Petrovna clenched her fists, threw herself on the floor, and fell into convulsions. She had to be removed by force. This morning she was found unconscious on Grigoryi's grave. I hear that she tried to commit suicide. Helena thinks she is a fraud, and is beside herself, poor child. What is one to say or do?"

Maria made up her mind at once to call on this Lisaveta Petrovna, but said nothing about it to the princess. She changed the topic of conversation and asked in detail about the young prince, without curiosity but with a delicate hint of the mother instinct which they possessed in common. The princess responded gratefully, and with a sense of relief; meanwhile in Maria's mind a picture was taking shape with the aid of the princess's remarks. She sat still and listened attentively, smoking a cigarette and staring ahead of her.

There were times when her gift of inner vision seemed a burden, yet it was always wonderful to her to be able to see into people. When she left, the princess said: "It seems to me we had been friends for years." Maria smiled.

As the day passed the disquieting rumors that had been in the air became menacing. Kislovodsk had been surrounded by revolutionary troops. Mitya, with that proud defiance that was so like his father, said: "Well, mother, we'll sell our lives as dearly as possible, won't we?" "Yes, my brave darling," she answered. "It's a pity that Ivan Dymow is no longer with us," he sighed. She consoled him. "For one thing, you are a hero yourself, and you forget that we have Yefim Leontovitch." Mitya looked searchingly at the student, who blushed. Then, with a glance of timid devotion at Maria, he said: "You have only to command. Command, and I obey." There was so much sincerity and firmness in his voice that Maria gave him her hand impulsively, which he touched humbly with his lips. Nothing can happen to me, she thought, while I have good people about me.

As she approached the Nelidov apartment that evening, she heard laughter, shouting and popping of corks, and the tinkle of glasses. A string orchestra was playing a wild, uncouth Russian melody. She opened the door of the sitting-room. Ten or twelve young men, all relatives, were seated around a table, singing, carousing, and smoking. At intervals one of them would get up to throw rouble notes to the musicians. Maria passed into the next room. Here were several elderly ladies and gentlemen, and with them a dazzlingly beautiful girl of about eighteen years. She

had short curly hair, a skin of opalescent whiteness, and great, yellow eyes, severe and unseeing. Maria stood fascinated. At that moment Princess Nelidov, who sat alone in her bedroom, called out to her. "I have been waiting for you," she said, as Maria came in. "Sit down beside me and say something. I like the sound of your voice." From the sitting-room, where the funeral supper was continuing so touchingly, came the strains of a mournful chorus.

While she strove to hearten the princess, who sat lost in grief, Maria felt as if she were groping in the dark in a strange room. The princess stared at her fixedly, and, except for occasional flashes, incomprehendingly. Maria spoke of her loneliness during the last months on the estate, of Vanya's birth, and of that night of pain, when her longing for Alexander was so poignant that she seemed suddenly to see him in the flesh, and stifled her cries in the fear of displeasing him. He had been invisibly present, guiding her in every thought and deed. She told of her dealings with the peasants; of the spirit of rebellion and animosity that had taken possession of them over night. Even the gentlest and most intelligent had failed her. One day they asserted their ownership of the forest and declared that it was to be cut down and sold. She had tried in vain to argue with them; she had appealed to their conscience, and again in vain; then she had gone alone with the elders into the forest where the most violent of the agitators had already begun to fell the trees. She had torn away the axe from one of them and had called out: "Not another stroke!" She had pictured to them the sin and the sacrilege they were committing against God and man, and had spoken elo-

quently of the violence they were doing to the memory of their master, who had been just and kind towards them. Many of them had grumbled, but many others had said nothing and had lowered their eyes. She had told them that a tree was like themselves, one of God's creatures, and that these were young trees, lovingly planted and cared for, to shade their children and their grandchildren, and not yet ready for the axe. Did they want to sell God's creatures for filthy lucre? If they did, then they ought to sell her, too, for she would no longer care to be their mistress. She would not move from where she stood until they promised faithfully to leave the forest as it was; if not they would have to cut her down, too. Thereupon they had taken counsel, and the elders had come to her and had promised faithfully that not a twig of the trees should be touched, and then they had asked forgiveness for their sin. Thus she had saved the forest for the time being, but that it was there to-day she did not dare assert.

The princess took Maria's hand and pressed it. "Every hour that we live in this country we are the victims of the most vicious whims of chance," she said; "or perhaps that is the law of life, and we who were life's spoiled children are only now beginning to learn it. Sometimes I grow so afraid. I personally have nothing much left to lose, but I tremble for everybody I see, for the people, for the human race,—even though most men create nothing but evil."

"Probably most men don't matter at all," Maria remarked. "I believe that it is only the individual that matters. The individual is often like the magical drop of medicine that heals the whole organism. Light emanates only from the individual. I had to stop at a

hotel in Tula with my children, because the train for the South ran only twice a week. There was trouble on the first night. The hotel was invaded by soldiers, and orders were issued that every civilian was to turn over all the money he had with him; nobody was to leave his room; at eight o'clock in the morning there would be a thorough search; and anybody on whom money was found would be summarily executed. Think of my position. I had eighty thousand roubles hidden on my person—every kopeck I had been able to raise. If that were taken from me, my children and I would be as good as lost. We had been separated from my servants and from the trustworthy man who had accompanied us. A guard had been placed before my door. I knew too well how thorough these people were to think of hiding the money in the room. All I could do was to await events, for, of course, I did not dream of giving up the money voluntarily. From three until half past nine in the morning I walked incessantly back and forth in my room. I was not conscious of fear, although I had no notion of what might be in store for us. The only thing I could see clearly and unwaveringly was that it was my duty to save myself and my four boys from the danger that threatened us. At nine o'clock three soldiers, a non-commissioned officer, and a woman entered the children's room. The boys were rudely awakened, and the furniture, the beds, the floors, the walls, the curtains, and the trunks were thoroughly searched. I went in and looked at these people. Grim, inhuman faces: no hope there. One of them ordered me harshly to leave; another followed behind to shut the door. As I turned my head, it seemed to me I could see in this man something, a cer-

tain flicker, an inexpressibly remote indication of a softness foreign to the others. He had short bristly red hair and a freckled skin, and between his puffed lips were gaps and black teeth. I trembled a moment and of a sudden I beckoned to him. He came towards me. I tore open my dress, took out the bundle of eighty thousand-rouble notes, and put it into his hands. 'Five human lives are in your hands,' I said to him; 'now do whatever you like.' He took the package without the flicker of an eyelash, put it in his pocket, and disappeared. Immediately after, the others came into my room. Here, as in the children's room, everything was tossed topsy-turvy: laundry, clothes, shoes, and everything found in every drawer and cranny. Then the woman remained alone with me and I had to undress. Finally, she, too, was gone. A quarter of an hour later, my heart meanwhile pounding like mad, the red-haired soldier came into my room, listened a moment, brought out the package of money, and handed it to me in silence. I stammered a few incoherent words and asked how I could show my gratitude. To offer him money seemed madness, since he had just made me a present of eighty thousand rubles. He shook his head and said: 'Don't think about it, little mother. Alas, we are in blood and sin up to our ears. Perhaps I have now earned a little of God's mercy. Maybe He will put this in the other plate of the scale.' With that he left. And I felt almost ashamed, as if I had wronged him by my earlier fear and doubt."

As Maria finished her story the beautiful girl came in. She went over to the princess and said in a voice as brittle as glass and trembling with anger: "Stepan Fedorovitch has just been saying that he knew this

Lisaveta Petrovna in Petersburg. She was a cabaret-singer, and heaven knows what else she must have been. It is plain enough that you have been the victim of an impostor, and that it would be ridiculous to bother any more about her."

"My niece, Helena," said the princess, presenting her to Maria, who had smiled with pleasure on seeing the girl come in.

"She hasn't a kopeck, that miserable creature," Helena went on bitterly; "the manager of the hotel threatened yesterday to put her out. And as for that farce on Grigoryi's grave, that was intended to impress you; the bullet only grazed the skin of her left arm. Very careful she was. What a dirty business!"

"But even though there be only one grain of truth in what she says, you ought to be lenient towards her, Helena Nikolaievna," said Maria.

Helena went white. "How did she dare!" she cried, shaking with loathing. "Aside from the fact that she has not the slightest proof to support her blackmailing pretensions, there are other reasons, inner reasons. . . !" She compressed her lips and seemed even slenderer, more highly strung than before. "Are we to allow her to bespatter Grigoryi's memory? What is it to you? Why are you taking her side?"

"I am not taking sides," replied Maria, who sensed suddenly an indefinable air of guilt and dissimulation about the girl; "I say merely that one should not judge rashly. Do not be angry with me." She arose and went back to her room.

Menasse was in the corridor before her door. "The hotel is surrounded," he said as soon as he saw her. "Groups of men armed to the teeth are guarding the

exits. No one is allowed to leave the hotel after dark. The penalty is death. Nobody knows as yet who issued this order. Nobody knows whether we are being protected or are merely being guarded against possible escape. The thing has become serious; it is a matter of life and death."

He opened the door of her room as if it had been his own, started in, remembered as an after-thought that she should precede him, and followed her in. "Look here," he began with rather grotesque familiarity, "it would be absurd to wait until they stood us against a wall and shot us. Those of us who don't escape will have to take the consequences. I have a plan. I like you; I feel sorry for the children, and I respect your husband. He is a thoroughbred and it would be a dirty trick if I did not look after his family when it was in danger. As I've just told you, I have a plan. Everything can easily be arranged. Of course it will cost a lot of money to get away, but money doesn't mean much in matters of life and death."

He looked around nervously, stepped quickly to the door and peered through a crack. Then he came back to Maria and went on to say, in a low, hoarse voice, that it would cost such an ungodly amount of money that only a whole group could foot the bill. He had already picked out certain people whom he liked, people whom it would be a pity to kill. He had talked to them about his plans and they had given him *carte blanche* to go ahead. Did Maria wish to join? And if so, would she be willing to follow his orders blindly? Success was impossible without strict discipline. He had thought it all out; the risk was great, but anything was

better than to be butchered here. After all, one was always in God's hands.

He was small and moved like a puppet. A little crooked, almost totally devoid of eyelashes and eyebrows, dressed like a dandy as if he had just come from the haberdasher's, he was thoroughly convinced of his own immense importance.

Maria reflected. "Very good, Menasse," she said. "I am willing to trust you. As you know, there are eight of us, for my three servants will have to be included. That is the one condition that I must insist upon."

Menasse shrugged his shoulders and remarked in business-like fashion that their inclusion meant merely added expense to Maria. Sixty people represented his limit, and he had forty-seven already. The total sum required seemed to be about five hundred thousand roubles, although circumstances might transpire which would increase this sum materially. "Above all," he concluded, "silence! Terrible things are going to happen in the next few hours, but you are to keep quiet and make no move until you hear from me. I am now your general, and that means obedience. Good night."

Maria looked in amazement at his skinny legs, his bull neck, and his teeming energy. He went out. She stepped over to the open window and drew a deep breath. The moon was nearly in the full and swimming in a sea of peace. The black masses of hill and mountain took on gradually the shapes of solemn giants whose contours trembled against the blue sky. Dewy moisture filled the air; the descending darkness strove towards the silvery light; the earth strove with mute signs towards unattainable regions. Maria would have

liked to pray. She was filled with a happy fervor; but the hotel with all its anxiously beating hearts, with all its human confusion and gloom, stretched its arms out to her and she felt as if she were sinking back into them. A clock struck twelve. There was a timid knock at her door. Maria called out fearlessly and Princess Nelidov walked in, wearing a veil over her hair. As timidly as she had knocked, she came forward with an air of entreaty, almost as if she had been an inferior. Had she disturbed Maria? If Maria Yakovlevna wished to retire, she would leave immediately. She herself was unable to sleep any more. She laid two folded hands tenderly on Maria's shoulder.

But, no, Maria told her; not at all. Nor was she herself able to sleep. Something within her was stirring in rebellion and resounding with the echo of many voices. They sat down. A lamp on a corner table shed a dim light.

It was a sort of curiosity that had urged her to come, the princess said. She had been thinking of all that Maria had told her, and had been unable to think of anything else. "What is that power that is in you? Where does it come from? How does it happen that you, a foreigner in our country, are able to take in all our circumstances and meet our people as if you were related to them by generations of life among them? You have the glance and the gait of a person rooted in our soil, and yet it is not your soil. You have the gift of our peasant speech; you can touch the besotted soul of a brutish soldier; yet you have never really lived with these people. I talk to you of Grigoryi as if you were my own sister, and I have met you casually perhaps twice. What kind of woman are you? What

is it about you that is so different? Do you know? Or do I annoy you with my questions?"

"Not at all," said Maria, smiling. "Only, you rather surprise me—."

"Surprise you? Why? Do you think that I am in duty bound to lie buried in my grief? You have driven it deeper into my consciousness, but at the same time you have made it less self-centered. We do not owe ourselves as many tears as those about us force from us with their conviction that they are entitled to sympathize with us. One's most precious possession is taken away, but it draws one after it. Mourning is frequently only a refined form of hypocrisy; never does the soul so hunger for elation as in the midst of grief over an irreparable loss. I can see in your face that you understand what I mean."

"I admire your courage, princess. It was that which surprised me."

"Courage comes last; it comes just before the end, Maria Yakovlevna. And we have reached the end. But do you prefer not to answer my questions? Can you answer them? You smile; your smile brings me hope."

Maria leant forward with her clasped hands in her lap. "You told me that you remembered Alexander von Krüdener very well," she said. "You knew him rather long ago. What sort of impression have you retained of him? I mean intrinsically, not socially."

The princess considered. "It is difficult," she confessed with hesitation. "I know too much about him. We who belong to the highest rank know too much about one another to retain a clear image of a personality. He seemed to me very reserved and reticent. Un-

bending; unyielding. He is from the Baltic provinces, isn't he? They are all stubborn. He had that perfection of manner, that innate flawlessness, that emanates from certain people like a perfume. Many girls were in love with him in those days, but to other people he seemed chilly; he was like a man who has, physically or spiritually, spent a long time by himself and has lost the way back into the society of men. Is that right?"

Maria nodded. "It fits like a shadow on a wall. It is true, and yet it doesn't mean anything. Unbending, unyielding—you've got something of him in those words. He bent me, made me yield; but if I had broken I should not have been the woman he needed. I came from a world without set lines of demarcation. One belonged neither to the nobility nor to the middle-class; one was suspended between the two. I was born in Germany but brought up in Austria, where the peculiar political and social atmosphere itself induces a certain laxity. My actions used to be the subject of criticism, for I was always different from the others, always at war with everybody. I was seeking myself, or seeking something outside myself that I could hold fast to; and in this search I strayed in every direction, struck everything in the face, became entirely savage. I broke with my family and with most of my friends, for I had all sorts of notions about freedom and was in danger of losing myself in hysteria and promiscuity. Then I met Alexander. It was the crucial moment of my life. I was nineteen years old and all in a tangle. The state of one's sensuality is always an indicator of the degree of one's degeneration. I was abandoned and entangled. How strange that one can be both at the same time. But this was at a time when one was only half anything,

when one saw nothing with a clear eye, when to stick perseveringly to one path was to invite Coventry. Alexander and I never exchanged a word. I felt instinctively that he was curious about me, was watching me. Sure as I was of my magnetism, I realized that his was stronger, although it had not the power to free me immediately from my chains. He was himself unprepared for the decision he made to take me into his life. I shall spare you the details of a love-story. The important thing is that we were married and that each of us knew full well that his destiny was now at stake. What months, princess, what years! We were like two duelists, two prizefighters. He confessed once to me that if one unforgetable revelation had not occurred to show him what was really in me, he would have sent me home like a shot in the beginning, for I was undisciplined, unprincipled, filled with false notions and prejudices about love and marriage, man and woman, and God and mortal. You have the whole of Europe in you, he used to repeat, and for a long time I did not know what he meant. I would resist him and confront him with what I called my personality, that little hothouse plant that he plucked petal by petal and fiber by fiber until nothing was left but shame and obstinacy—and always obstinacy. And then he went after the seed, tirelessly, ceaselessly, day and night, with passionate patience and the deepest insight. He dug me up out of myself; he tore me apart, in order to make me over. It hurt, I assure you. There were days, weeks, when I would collapse, smothered and broken between love and hate. And he, eternally after me with a sort of spiritual whip: You must go through this; you must undergo this purification even though its

flames destroy you; better that we perish honorably with and by each other than that we die of thirty years of misunderstanding and secret wounds. In the end I grew towards him out of my ruins; he found me and won me. That was when I became pregnant for the first time, after five years of marriage. It goes without saying that he did not remain unchanged either. If I had not been able to bring something to him, I should have meant nothing to him. Victories imply intelligent give and take. But I was his creation and knew it. At about this time he retired from public life and we went to the estate and set to work. We always had a common goal. In our opinions and our actions we always came to the same conclusions. We read the same books, thought the same thoughts, and pronounced the same judgments. He blamed severely any neglect in himself with a self-discipline that was almost monastic. It was impossible to persuade him to snatch at the slightest advantage to which another might be entitled. It would have been easier to soften granite. What he considered his duty, his task in life, was never canalized but was rather a constantly swelling stream of unlimited devotion. Of himself he demanded the utmost, and he insisted that I give of myself in the same measure. I had an innate strain of idleness and day dreaming which he drove out of me altogether. There were times when I could cry with anger and self-pity, times when he demanded too much of me; but he was always right and after I had forced myself to do as he insisted, he could make me forget all my ill-will by one kindly word. When a decision had to be made, he would say, there must be no self-indulgence, no coddling, no waste of one's emotions. That was his attitude towards the

world, towards his children, and towards his inferiors. His example was a living refutation of every objection. He had a noble conception of his people, an exalted notion of lordship which he saw as the creation of service, obedience, and respect for tradition. To him, as to the lowliest peasant, the Czar was divine. This Russia and this Russian people were to him the sacred and nourishing soil of humanity, the cradle of the future, the larder of the world. I am speaking of him, but also of myself, for there was no longer any question of difference between us. He and I were fused in this dynamic mysticism. We lived it. I knew that when he took a handful of soil, he was weighing and analyzing the whole of it: his land, his people, and the sky overhead. I knew that when he walked into a group of his peasants to administer justice, it was with the highest sense of responsibility, as if the sentence he pronounced were to remain eternal. When a peasant called upon him for help he would go immediately, though the matter in hand be of the most trifling. Sleigh-rides through the burningly cold winter night were nothing rare. The peasants had the right to claim his help. It was in this that he taught me to be their mistress. Bit by bit I learned my responsibility. Mistress and mother—they meant pretty much the same thing to him; mother of many—and so the peasants call their mistress little mother. A beautiful name, and one that prescribes one's course. If you bear that in mind, princess, does it not seem to simplify everything?"

"I understand, I understand," the princess murmured; "simple, yes. Marvelous things are always simple, after all. I understand your evolution; I understand your heart; but *après tout,* aren't you desper-

ately disappointed now? Hasn't it all been in vain, now that things stand as they do? Now that the Lord has withdrawn his hand and we are horribly abandoned?"

"I am not disappointed," Maria answered. "My path is still there. And I have not been abandoned by the Lord, whatever meaning you may put on that word."

The princess asked: "How long is it since your husband left?"

"Almost exactly a year. His last letter reached me at Christmas time."

"And how can you bear his absence? It is bad enough ordinarily, but in these circumstances—"

"It is all part of my path," Maria said. "I know that he is with me in space; what, then, does distance matter? I have only to close my eyes for a moment to see him, hear him, smile at little peculiarities of his speech. I ask him questions, answer him—confer with him. And the same thing happens to him."

The princess replied: "You have imagination, Maria Yakovlevna. I do not mean to belittle your feelings; everything you tell me increases my esteem and confirms my ideas about you. You are as limpid as water; there is no secrecy about you. How consoling it is to chat with you, even just to sit and look at you! But tell me one thing. I believe in your confidence; I believe that it helps you to overcome the longing, the impatience, the worry about the fate of the man you love so greatly. But don't you also feel as if you had recovered your freedom? Wait. Do not answer me now. It is so delicate, so hard to find the words. I do not

want you to suspect me of wishing to intrude upon you, or to make you lay bare your secrets—."

"You may say anything at all; I shall certainly not misunderstand," Maria interrupted gently.

The princess continued: "There is such passion in you. You are certainly the most passionate woman I have ever met. And at the same time the most inaccessible! I mean that in a specific sense. How are you able to pour your whole reserve of passion into one vessel, and forbid yourself ever to take one step into the unknown? How does one attain to this firmness? Women are terribly helpless creatures. Either they surrender themselves or they stifle their desire; and whichever they do, they are cheated of their dream. And here you are who have built yourself so strong a house that the devil himself cannot get into it. We pound on your door and walls in search of a weak spot, for we who live in ruins are envious people. Tell me: wasn't it an unbearable despotism? Occasionally, only occasionally? Don't you feel deep within you a sense of freedom, or at least spaciousness? Has not a burden been lifted from you despite all your love? Were you not robbed of your free will in all these years, and don't you feel now that life may be standing at the gate with a precious gift and that you may take it without scruple? Or even feeling scruple, wouldn't you take it, take the gift? I mean: have your soul and mind been filled so entirely by this one man and by his will, and by your life with him that without him, no emotion exists for you, no allurement, no temptation? You are after all a womanly woman; everything about you is glowing and blooming. If I were a man, what wouldn't I stake

to win you! You blush; how charming, how touching! Like a young girl. But answer me, answer me!"

Maria felt a touch of fear. Almost mechanically she replied: "Four children, princess. In addition to all the—what did you call it?—the 'firmness,' four children! Have you seen my children?"

The princess was silent. She was resting both her bare white arms, which contrasted with her black gown, on the table. Maria, tardily ashamed of her boast of motherhood, read on her darkened brow: I was a mother, too. Maria rested her head in her hand. After a moment she spoke: "That was a selfish answer, princess. I jumped from one path of happiness to another, perhaps out of cowardice. Your question was like a sudden flare. It blinded me. The truth? If I only knew. I believe it is to be found in fear. Wherever the abyss lies, there lies the truth. My free will had indeed been taken from me, but I had not the slightest desire or cause to make any further choice. My choice had been irrevocable. You remarked that the devil had no place in my house. That is appallingly true; and, therefore, I have to be very brave, criminally brave, perhaps, for I have chosen the side of the angels. I do not deny that temptation might exist for me. Who is ever free from temptation? Blood is a terrifying power. But if I were forced to choose again, I should have to make the entire circle to the other pole from my first choice. One cannot choose the divine twice, any more than one can grope around and experiment with it. If ever I have to choose again, there will be only one choice possible: the devil. Only the devil could lead me into temptation. But let us hope things do not reach that point." She laughed.

The princess rose and embraced her silently. Whether it was that she had no further objection to urge, or whether Maria's unexpected violence had overcome them, she showed no sign of skepticism. Before leaving she said: "Of course, of course!" And again in a troubled tone: "Of course. All this 'if' and 'but,' this letting things drift instead of deciding for oneself, makes our fate insipid; it makes us weary before our time. We are always drawing conclusions, but at the crucial moment we deceive ourselves about the important things." She continued cordially: "I should like to have a picture of you, Maria Yakovlevna. Send me your picture as soon as possible; it will be my talisman. Who knows whether we may not be separated in the next hour? Your picture will give me something to protect me." Maria promised her a picture.

She lay awake throughout the rest of the night. From roof to cellar the hotel was like an electric battery, charged with fear. Hurrying steps ran through the halls. Maria knew that love-affairs were going on from room to room, many of them lasting no longer than the first hour's intoxication. There they hurry along, nibbling secretly in desperation at forbidden fruit in order to dull their emotions, thought Maria, half contemptuously and half compassionately. But there were also other steps: steps of messengers, of traitors, of spies, of guards. Gusts of air, now warm and now chill, came in through the open windows. It grew cold towards morning, and Maria finally dozed off and slept until noon. It was the crying of little Vanya that awoke her. Eugenia, the white-clad nurse, brought him in on her arms and looked reproachfully at Maria because she had so long neglected her duty.

Vanya was in a serious mood; his fat little fists dug into his mother's breast and he snapped at it like an angry little fish.

Rifle shots sounded in the vicinity of the hotel, increasing in frequency towards evening and coming steadily closer. Yefim Leontovitch came in looking upset. He confessed that he would not feel safe unless Maria allowed him to spend the night in the boys' room. Maria counted on news from Menasse. By way of making ready, she told the two young servants, Litvina and Arina, to pack the trunks, much to the delight of the boys. It seemed to her there was something of importance that she had planned to do and had forgotten. She grew nervous, worrying. She put on an evening dress and started downstairs, came back, looked through a box for a photograph, wrote her name on it, put it in an envelope, and bade Arina take it to Princess Nelidov. But that was not the important thing she had forgotten.

In the public rooms of the hotel the usual noisy activity prevailed. All these men and women who had been robbed of their homes and now of their freedom as well, behaved with defiant heedlessness. Only a few faces betrayed a realization of danger. Some one was saying gayly that fighting was already in progress in the streets, and that in one of the courts of the hotel lay dead and wounded men. They had seen blood enough and were accustomed to horror. All that interested them now was their own fate, to which they seemed to look forward with frivolous curiosity. The *tac-tac-tac* of a machine-gun sounded sharply in the midst of a Viennese waltz. From time to time soldiers ran past the windows. Maria noticed that first three

or four, and then fifteen or twenty sinister-looking figures had come in and were roaming through the halls and dining-rooms. The hotel guests were patently trying not to notice them; they joked, talked, and acted as if no outsiders were present. These people in ragged, or at least informal, dress contrasted grimly with the magnificence of the ladies' gowns and the tail-coats and white shirt fronts of the men. They put themselves in the way of the waiters, who were hurrying with buckets of champagne, posted themselves insolently beside the club chairs in which distinguished men were lounging, and made their way casually through groups of talking guests. Maria thought it was time for Menasse to turn up. A shrill whistle was heard and immediately thereafter, during an intermission in the playing of the dining-room orchestra, strange music was audible, coming from a distant room. A young man, a writer from Moscow, came up to Maria and told her that an Armenian wedding was being held in the big hall. It was extremely interesting, he said, offering to escort her. Maria was always like a child of fifteen when anything new was in the air. Immediately she took his arm. Meanwhile a change was visible in the bearing of part of the gathering. An elderly man was addressing several ladies and wringing his hands. Maria heard one of them whisper: "But my jewelry! My pearls!" The old man was saying: "It is a matter of life and death." At the entrance to the billiard-room stood two young girls, pale and despondent, with wide open eyes. Meanwhile they were moving towards the hall and the writer was saying to Maria: "Indescribable, really, the way these Armenians know how to do

things up. You'll see in a moment. Absolutely fantastic."

Other spectators had joined them. Stepan Nelidov, in particular, drew attention to himself by the objectionable manner in which he gave vent to his enthusiasm, as if he were in a circus. Just outside the door of the banqueting hall, where Maria stood, was the base of a cylindrical shaft that went up to the roof of the seven-story building. A circular gallery surrounded by an iron railing projected from each story into the shaft. The straight staircases leading to the first four floors were visible from the ground. When Maria looked up she had the feeling that something was going on up there that concerned her. She heard, from far up, loud voices followed by cries like laughter. Then there was silence. She had just turned her attention to the Armenians in the hall, however, when the cries commenced anew.

The exotic band, composed of several wind instruments and two hollow drums, was moving from a slow rhythm into a swift one. A young boy and girl stepped forward to dance. Their first turns and movements were pastoral, slow, and charming; but as the tempo of the music quickened they abandoned themselves to its swifter cadence. The great, high-ceilinged room was bathed in light and brilliantly spotted with the colors of blue, yellow, green and red costumes, all of the most violent shades and covered with gold and silver embroidery. Out of the hazy smoke shone the faces of incomparably beautiful women and of pale, black-bearded men, sitting majestically and looking on. On the other side of the room danced a garland of young girls, dressed in lace. They swayed and turned

about. The deafening music ceased and they intoned a solemn song. Maria stood smiling on the threshold, excited by these colors and sounds brought from a remote world, but depressed, too, by the sense of her own foreign and undesired presence among these Armenians. Of a sudden she heard again the ugly cries from above, but this time they were coming rapidly closer. She stepped back into the middle of the shaft and looked up. Down the staircase of the third floor a woman was running with such terrifying speed that it seemed as if she must fall at any moment. Her hair was flying unbound about her head; even at that distance it was plain that her face was distorted with terror. She reached the gallery, clung for a moment to the railing, and ran down to the second floor. Maria knew immediately that it was Lisaveta Petrovna, whom she had intended to see, and knew also what it was she had forgotten and that had been tormenting her.

With quick determination she stepped to the foot of the staircase. The wildly panting creature had reached the first floor and had stopped again for a moment. She looked back, out of breath. Behind her came a girl whom Maria recognized as the Princess Helena. But her gait and appearance in no way justified the frantic haste and fear of the other woman. She was coming down thoughtfully step by step and her features, although darkened and obviously concentrated on a distinct purpose, wore a double expression of disgust and weariness. Maria walked up a few steps. The fugitive flew toward her, stopped, thought herself confronted by a new enemy, and uttered one of the shrieks which had sounded so much like laughter. She stumbled and would have fallen if Maria had not sprung forward and

caught her. The girl snatched at her, clasped her arms about her, slid down with arms still clasped and knelt before her. Princess Helena had meanwhile caught up with her. She remained standing a few steps above them while the expression of disgust deepened in her exquisitely pure and beautiful face. "How can you touch such filth? Touch it!" A shudder ran through her. Whimpering, the girl pressed her face into Maria's gown. "She wants to murder me," she howled dully into the material, into Maria's body. People had moved over from the doorway and stood in a crowd about the foot of the staircase, gazing in astonishment. Stepan Nelidov was smiling ironically and leaning against the wall.

"What has happened, Helena Nikolaievna? Why is she saying this?" asked Maria. Her simple, kindly tone visibly affected the young princess, who lowered her head, allowed her short curly hair to fall softly over her cheeks, and stood silent and motionless.

"Come with me, Lisaveta," said Maria to the girl, who still knelt before her. "Nobody will hurt you." She raised the swooning girl to her feet, slipped an arm about her to hold her up, and led her through the maze of staring eyes towards the lift, into which she gently pushed her. When they reached her floor, the girl had to be lifted from the seat into which she had collapsed and where she sat brooding. Mitya and Alyosha ran towards their mother, calling out gayly that the trunks had been sent for. Yefim explained that three men had come up, and had carried off the two large and five smaller pieces of luggage without a word. The servants had not dared to interfere with them or to inquire by whom they had been sent. Handbags and toilet sets

were still lying about. While Maria was talking to Eugenia, a boy appeared with a note. "To be carried out immediately: Upon receipt of this note you and your people are to leave the hotel by the door next to the kitchen quarters. There you will be met by a trustworthy person and escorted to a place where you will spend one, or possibly two, nights. Do not delay longer than a half hour; beyond that time I answer for nothing. The trunks have been taken care of and your hotel bill has been paid. Menasse."

Notwithstanding the critical nature of her situation, Maria was quietly amused. My general is strict, she thought as she helped dress the children. There were still many things to be packed. Arina and Litvina scurried through the rooms. Vanya cried. Eugenia rocked him in her arms. Maria would have liked to say good-bye to the Princess Nelidov, but there was no time. Lisaveta Petrovna had curled up in a corner of the sofa and was looking on with the eyes of a timid animal. Suddenly she sprang up and clasped her hands before Maria. "Take me with you," she begged. Maria answered: "We have only a few minutes; you couldn't come clad as you are." She was in a kimono and had blue silk slippers on her feet. "I wouldn't go into my room again for anything in the world," she said helplessly. The boys, full of impatience, were silently urging Maria on. Arina was loading Yefim Leontovitch with handbags. Mitya, despite his princely bearing, had always shown much sympathy for the suffering of others. He said to his mother: "The woman can put on one of your coats, mother; we have scores of coats." At a sign from Maria, Litvina brought forward a coat in which Lisaveta wrapped herself. "Are

you willing to leave your things here?" Maria asked, and Lisaveta replied: "Anything to be gone, to get away!"

Out into the corridor went Yefim, the boys, Eugenia carrying sleeping Vanya, Arina, Litvina, and Lisaveta. Maria followed them. Suddenly, Helena Nelidov stood before her. "You are leaving!" she murmured gloomily and in amazement. "You are leaving! And you're taking that scum with you, making her your ward. How can you give your friendship to that shameless creature?"

"I see only an unhappy creature, Helena Nikolaievna," said Maria. "That is all I know about her. Can I, who am fleeing myself, cast off an unhappy creature who seeks refuge with me?"

Once more Maria's words and voice seemed to appease the young princess. Her face contracted. Suddenly she tore with trembling hands a diamond brooch from her frock and pressed it into Maria's hands. "I do not want to be more criminal than I already am," she said in a curious manner. "Give her this. Change it into money for her. She is poor. I have no money myself, but don't betray me."

Maria could not speak. She let her eyes speak her gratitude. The floor seemed to burn beneath her feet. Fedya had turned to see who might be detaining her. Helena accompanied her a few steps. At the head of the staircase she grasped Maria's arm and whispered in the voice of a child in pain: "I am afraid; I am so afraid," while her extraordinary eyes opened to their widest. "I am so miserably afraid," she said again; "and it is perhaps my fear that has made me so wicked."

"My dear, my poor dear," whispered Maria affectionately. The young princess buried her face in her hands and walked slowly back while Maria started down the stairs with a heavy heart. At the door designated by Menasse stood a soldier with a field cap and fixed bayonet. Silently, he took the lead of their caravan. They crossed a small court and went through a street over which hung the reflection of a fire glowing on the left, high up in the valley, where houses were still burning. Sparks that looked like gold embroidery were flying upward towards the moon. Horsemen galloped by at full speed, while Fedya and Alyosha gazed in amazement and Mitya drove them on like an anxious shepherd. Yefim was panting under his load, and Maria, despite his protest, took one of the leather bags. The soldier turned into an alley. The houses grew more and more wretched. He hesitated, looked about, seemed to have lost his way in the unlighted street. Another soldier approached out of a doorway, and they stood talking together in an undertone. The roar of heavy cannon shook the night. Suddenly Alyosha began to cry, and Maria took him by the hand. They had reached the edge of the town, the last houses near the railway station. Again the soldier turned back a few steps. Lisaveta, who walked with difficulty in her slippers, was supporting herself against a wall. From the other end of the alley came the steps of a patrol. The soldier whistled. Yefim hurried to him, calling to Maria and the rest. They went into a dilapidated, one-story house that seemed to be deserted. The soldier pushed open the door with the butt of his rifle. Then he struck a match. They were in a room about twelve feet square, with a ceiling so low that one could touch

it with one's head. The walls were damp, green, and moldy. There was no furniture in the room. The match went out. Here, said the soldier, they would have to remain. They were not to stir, or to open the shutters, if they valued their lives. Maria asked in the dark if he knew where Menasse was to be found. He did not. He had not even heard the name before. He knew only that a number of people were being hidden in houses surrounding the station in order that they might be removed at the first opportunity. Maria asked if they might light a candle, at least until the children were put to sleep. The soldier advised against it. How long would they have to remain, these ten people, in this damp hole? He could not say. Once more he urged that they refrain from anything which might betray their presence here, and disappeared.

They were all silent for a while, filled with moody contemplation. Alyosha had fumbled for his mother's hand and put his face down into it. She could feel him trembling with fear. "We must have some light," she said. Yefim Leontovitch offered to slip out of doors and stand guard, proposing, if he observed anything suspicious, to knock thrice on the shutter, at which signal the light should be put out. It took a little time for Arina to find a candle. As soon as it was lighted, blankets and coats were hastily spread on the filthy floor, and they disposed themselves for slumber. The boys, fully dressed, fell asleep as soon as they lay down.

Lisaveta lay beside Maria along the wall. Her head was buried in her arms, leaving exposed only the hastily pinned up, disordered brown hair. From time to time a shudder would go through her body. Maria, with

Vanya at her breast, looked at her meditatively. When Eugenia had taken the sated child, and the candle had been put out, Maria sent Litvina to fetch Yefim Leontovitch so that he, too, might get some rest. But Yefim sent back word that he thought a guard essential, and he would spread his coat on the doorstep and lie there. Sleep did not come to Maria. She listened in the darkness to the healthy breathing of the three boys, each recognizable by the volume and rhythm of his respiration. Even Vanya's thin bubbling was clearly audible. The servants slept; she lay awake, pondering, listening. On her right she heard a deep sigh. "Can't you sleep, Lisaveta Petrovna?" she whispered.

The girl moved closer. "Who are you?" she asked, also in a whisper. "You have picked me up, taken me with you. Why? Who are you?"

"If my name means anything to you—" said Maria, and told Lisaveta who she was. Silence fell again, and again there came a sigh as if squeezed out from beneath a heavy burden.

"What is it?" whispered Maria. "Open your heart. Speak."

"Oh, God in heaven," murmured the woman.

Maria whispered again: "We are in the dark and cannot see each other. The others are all sleeping. We are as good as alone. Speak."

"Helena Nikolaievna would like to trample me to death with her heels," said the voice bitterly. "And yet, she knows the whole story. Nobody else knows anything. Grigoryi confided in her. She could murder me in cold blood; yet she knows the truth. Oh, God in heaven."

"Is it true that Prince Grigoryi married you?" Maria asked.

"Don't ask me any questions," she protested in an anguished tone. "Yes. When I left the ship at Sebastopol the priest married us. When it was all over, the priest married us. I don't know whether the marriage can be contested or not, but it certainly took place, although in the most ghastly circumstances. No human imagination could possibly picture anything like it. Yes. When I left the ship we were married."

"What ship, Lisaveta Petrovna?"

Lisaveta paid no attention to the question. "I can't stay on here," she complained after a moment. "I have to go away. I want to go back for my things. How can I go on without clothes and shoes? To be sure, I don't know where I'd go if I had them. Or to whom."

"By the way," said Maria; "I must not forget that I was given a diamond brooch for you." Fearing that the woman might resent the gift as insulting, she added hastily: "Perhaps it was meant for you to keep as a souvenir; or perhaps the person meant to repair some injury done you."

Lisaveta understood. "I'll throw it back at her feet," she burst out, still in an undertone. "And even that would be too good for her. Does she think she can indemnify me by an alms for having drilled burning needles into my flesh like an executioner? The shame of it! If you can't give it back to her, give it to a beggar. I've been humiliated enough."

A good half hour went by in silence. The breathing of the sleepers had grown deeper when Lisaveta whispered suddenly: "Are you awake? Can you hear me?"

"I can hear you very well," Maria answered.

"I want to tell you about the ship. Come closer so that nobody else can hear." Maria moved closer.

"When I first met Grigoryi I was working in a cabaret just outside Petersburg. It was the lowest sort of haunt, where I earned just enough to keep from starvation. You see, I was a decent girl, whatever you may choose to think now. I was twenty-five and I had never had a lover. Every evening I stood half naked on a little stage and sang stupid, idiotic songs which I didn't half understand myself. I spent my days in a a garret and often went without supper. Grigoryi was on leave and came there with a group of friends. We looked at one another and fell in love on the spot. We were so much in love! I can't tell you how much. It was like a continuous tempest in the blood. We looked forward to the last day of his leave as to a death sentence. Scarcely a word was spoken between us; we were like a single person. He had decided on a desperate plan, and one evening he explained it to me. At first I thought he was raving. It was so terrible that my tongue froze and I couldn't speak. But his desire became mine. Separation was even more terrible than the plan. What he wished to do was no worse than waiting for his return and eating out my heart with worry about him. At least, so I thought then. I agreed to the plan. . . . Can you hear me?"

"Very well," Maria whispered.

"He planned to smuggle me secretly on board the battleship, hide me in his cabin, go about his duties as usual, and spend his free time in the cabin with me. I guessed more or less what that meant, and that if we were discovered it would mean the death of us both.

Women may not even visit battleships. But why waste words? I was willing, despite everything. The chief difficulty was that his orderly had to be let into the secret, for without a third person's help the thing was impossible. Grigoryi thought he could risk telling Piotr. He bribed him, and kept giving him more money, while we continued to live in fear of the fellow's malice or indiscretion. People become malicious, you know, on shipboard. The thing went off all right. Piotr carried me from the small boat into Grigoryi's cabin in a duffle-bag, where I crouched suffocating in linen and clothing. In that cabin, which was so small that I couldn't take three steps forward, I spent fourteen months."

Mechanically, Maria threw up her hands in astonishment while Lisaveta Petrovna continued: "Fourteen months of imprisonment, in loneliness and fright, or body to body with Grigoryi on a narrow cot. Fourteen months in mortal danger and fear, in a tiny, somber cell on the high seas. Fourteen months condemned to live almost without stirring or uttering a sound, condemned, he and I, to uninterrupted, horrible terror."

Maria listened in silence with wide open eyes.

"We had to arrange that nobody have any notion that his cabin was always locked. That in itself was enough to shatter anybody's nerves. There were the continual steps in the companion-way; steps of the watch, steps of officers. There were the signaling whistles; there was the drumming in the ears of the machinery, the constant clatter of iron on the floating monster, the rattle above and the beating of the waves below. What nights, what nights of fright! Kisses and love and fright! Lifted one moment up to the

skies and cast down the next into hell. Once, during inspection, I had to hide in a closet so small that for weeks afterward I had pains in the chest. One Easter Sunday Grigoryi fell ill, and we were nearly insane. He dared not confess it; he had to go through with his duties, drag himself about the deck, force the fever out of his system. The alternative was to throw ourselves into the sea. Off duty, he would lie in my arms listening, listening. I listened, too. We had to lie in one another's arms because the space was cramped. Often, when he was weary, he would give me a pillow and a blanket and I would make my bed on the floor. Or I would sit at the port-hole and stare out at the dark sea. He was tortured by the thought of what would happen if the ship went into action and he was wounded and killed. I tried to calm him as well as I could, but there was little strength in his darkened soul. Then he would accuse me of no longer loving him. And how could I protest except by desperate kisses? We cursed the second that gave us back to consciousness. He would lie beside me with cold sweat on his brow. Neither words nor silence could arrest the daily growth of the horror that filled us. He confessed that on deck and in the cabin, everything looked black to him. He seemed to detect suspicion in the eyes of his superior officers. His former cheerfulness disappeared. I would ask him if he regretted what he had done, and he would cling to me like a child that has been slapped, but I could read hate as well as love in his eyes. The slightest creaking noise frightened him, and at every unfamiliar sound he would tremble. Once he started in his sleep and cried out hideously. I put my arm about him and whispered that the end had

come. What end? he asked, and his questions persisted in morbid excitation, until I swore solemnly not to do a thing without his knowledge. You are my wife, he said, and I shall make you my wife before God and man, even though we never see one another thereafter. And that is exactly the way it happened. But my only thought was to get out of this hell, as I lay alone, biting my fingers to keep from shrieking. Time was to me a mad, vague thing. I would hear it buzzing rapidly like a revolving wheel; and then it would seem to me slack and slow, flapping disgustingly like a black flag. But the worst was yet to come. Piotr grew insolent. He was conscious of his power over us. I battled bitterly with the man. I could no longer eat the food he brought me in secret. He would stand while I ate, glaring at me, begging, and finally threatening me. I thought I could conceal it from Grigoryi, but I soon found out that he, too, suffered from Piotr's insolence. One evening Grigoryi rushed into the cabin, white with terror. He stammered that there was no doubt any more; we had been betrayed; one of the officers had not returned his greeting; at mess, others had whispered together. He was sure that we were lost. I stifled my fear, questioned him in detail, and was convinced that he was suffering from delusions. But they clung to his mind, and from that moment on he was in a state of frenzied fever. Three more days went by, the most terrible of them all, and we were in port. I can't remember what happened during the last hours on board, how I was brought ashore. I know that I awoke from a deep daze, and I have only a hazy recollection of what followed. Piotr brought me to a miserable inn, which was not where Grigoryi had

ordered him to leave me. In the evening he stumbled into my room completely drunk, hoping to find a defenseless woman. I fought with all the strength I had left, with words, reasons, prayers, tears, cries for help that went as unanswered as if the house had been deserted. The disgusting smell and the madness of the man made me faint, and at that moment Grigoryi rushed in. He had hunted for me through every inn in the harbor, and had finally found me. He knocked down the drunken pig and knelt before me, sobbing incessantly and begging my forgiveness. What had I to forgive? Next morning he brought a priest who performed an emergency ceremony, for I was lying rigid and speechless, like a log. After that, Grigoryi bade me farewell. . . . All this is as foggy in my mind as if somebody else had lived through it. Since then, I have never been the same. I wonder now how I was able to tell the story. But you drew it out of me, somehow. How, I don't know. And now I must leave. It is time."

Maria had observed that as Lisaveta's story went on, she told it more and more slowly. Towards the end she had paused after every third or fourth word, and her voice had sunk so low that Maria had strained her ears to catch the final words.

"You want to go," said Maria; "but where will you go? An hour ago you admitted that you didn't know to whom you could go."

"That is true; but I must go just the same."

"By the way, how did you happen to come to Kislovodsk? Did Prince Grigoryi bring you here?"

"Indeed, no. We had agreed without a word that we should never see one another again. Didn't I mention

that? When he left, I knew that he was not going back to his ship, that he was going into the Caucasus. And he knew that I intended to go to Kiev, where I have a sister who is married to a Government official. He left some money with me, but I gave it to my brother-in-law. I was like a woman dumb and blind. I knew where Grigoryi had gone. One day I received a telegram insisting that I come immediately. Not from him; from Helena Nikolaievna. She probably thought I might be able to save him. The truth was that we were farther apart than if we had never known one another before. To be sure, he had vanished into space without a word, and that was hard. . . . Now it is time I went."

Daylight had begun to sift through the cracks in the shutters. Lisaveta stood up. Maria told her to keep the coat, for the morning was chill; also, she might not be admitted into the hotel without it. But she shook her head in refusal. She seemed curiously obstinate and depressed. There was a kind of feverish impatience in her gestures. Maria rose too and went towards her with sisterly affection, trying to look into her pallid face, but Lisaveta turned away and was out of the door before Maria could seize her. Maria stood motionless, hot and cold inside. She felt as if a mountain had vanished before her into the earth and the air was still seething over the abyss. She sighed, almost as the other woman had sighed, in fear and humility. Then her eyes fell on the sleeping children and she was overcome by a sense of unfathomable wealth. Each of them was the image, the living cast of her dearest possession. She sighed again, but this time differently.

She lay down to sleep. Scarcely had she closed her eyes when there was a heavy knock on the door and Yefim Leontovitch and the soldier stood on the threshold. The soldier said they were to move on immediately to the station, where their train stood ready on the track. The children were awakened and ten minutes later they were in the deserted street, guided by the soldier. It led straight to the station, which was some way distant. The air was misty and cool. Maria motioned Yefim to walk beside her. She thanked him for his unselfish devotion and expressed her regret at having to part from him. She hoped that life would again bring them together some time, and looked forward to an opportunity to show her gratitude.

"Why do you thank me, Maria Yakovlevna," he said; "and why do you wish me to leave you? I have everything I need in this bundle. Why should I stay here when I might equally well be somewhere else? You are escaping; let me escape with you. If my presence annoys you, I can arrange to stay out of sight. Or you can think of me, if need be, as a stranger; there will be strangers enough about you. I know there is nothing about me that suggests sure protection, yet I should never forgive myself if I left you in this situation. Please put up with me, and rest assured that I won't be a bother to you."

Assent only was possible. "I have no hand free to shake yours," said Maria with her winning smile. "You are really an unusual man, Yefim Leontovitch. What have I done to deserve such devotion? You hardly know me."

Yefim blushed. "I know you better than you

imagine," he said. "I think about you a great deal."

A man in a straw hat was waving excitedly from the station. "That is Menasse," said Maria. "Good thing he's here."

Menasse was signaling them to hurry. "Good morning, general," said Maria. He asked crossly why she arrived so late; everybody else was already entrained. If they were to begin with unpunctuality, they would end in catastrophe. Gesticulating, he jumped onto the steps of a parlor-car coupled among a lot of freight cars, whose windows were black with people, each trying to seize and hold a seat. There he began to scold an old gentleman who had surrounded himself with his luggage. He shouted at a lady who started to ask him a question; ran from compartment to compartment, increasing the confusion wherever he appeared; threw a box out of his path in the corridor of the car; tore his flat straw hat from his head and twirled it about in the air in his zeal. He repeated a dozen times in a high falsetto voice that he expected unconditional obedience, and that he would throw up the job and leave them all to their fate if they did not submit to discipline. "Who is this?" he growled rudely at Maria, pointing to Yefim Leontovitch. Maria, with a good-natured expression in her short-sighted eyes, said calmly: "You would oblige me, Menasse, if you refrained from shouting so loudly. And you would also get on better with me if you did. This young man is one of my party. I shall vouch for his behavior and the expense he entails. Meanwhile, let us be friends"; and she put out her hand with a smile. He took it, disconcertedly and hurriedly, and then rushed away.

It was five in the morning when they boarded the

train. At ten they began to move at a snail's pace westward through the mountains in the direction of the sea. The confusion subsided gradually, although Menasse never wearied of demanding silence. The children, in particular, running through the corridor, seemed to try his patience. After a while, the train stopped, and he sprang excitedly to the window and looked through a crack in the shades. The passengers were silent and tense, while Menasse stuck out his arm behind, like an orchestra conductor marking a rest in the music. Maria knew only a few of her fellow-travelers: a Moscow manufacturer, a squire and his family from Tula, a Hungarian baron, Count and Countess Dukhorski from Petersburg, a banker from Kiev, and two elderly ladies who had been staying in the Palace Hotel. The car grew hot. The children asked for food and there was a long search through the suitcases. Vanya was nursed, Arina and Litvina serving as screens. At four in the afternoon the train stopped again.

For a time there was silence; then Menasse's high-pitched voice was heard. Mitya came forward with information: "There are men outside ordering everybody out of the cars." These words spread fear. They were the truth. The train had been stopped by a marauding band of thirty or forty men, whose leader had demanded Menasse's papers, which Menasse had rashly refused to show, despite threats of force. When they laid hands on him, however, he changed his mind, admitted that he had all the passports on his person, and commenced to bargain with the bandit. Meanwhile, some of the men had entered the car and driven the passengers forth. It soon became apparent

that they wanted to reserve this comfortable means of transportation for themselves. With the exception of a few women, the victims yielded without protest. Countess Dukhorski, her face expressing cold disdain, stood in the midst of a mountain of luggage spread over the flowering meadow. Menasse was talking hotly to the sinister leader of the mob, who was shaking his head in emphatic refusal. Nobody would be allowed back into the parlor car, or into any of the other cars. Were they to be chucked out here in these mountains, for the love of God, without shelter or roads? Yes, and they ought to be glad to get off so lightly. The sums mentioned by Menasse made no impression on him. Like Iago, he tried flattery; like the Marquis Posa, he tried to appeal to the fellow's sense of humanity. It was in vain. Then Maria came forward. She spoke quietly and with artless dignity. Her arguments were no more compelling than Menasse's had been, but after her first few words the man's attitude changed, although he did not cease to frown. He was evidently a peasant who had fought in the war. Maria spoke to him with a certain ease that came of a knowledge of the peasantry; there was a kind of cunning in the words she chose, which was as if she were saying to him: You know, don't you remember so-and-so; there can't be any misunderstanding between us;—all of this in a matter-of-fact tone, as if she were talking of the harvest, but yet in the tone of the mistress accustomed to having her orders obeyed. The man respected her. With the aid of Menasse's offer of money, she persuaded him to allow all the refugees to pile into two cattle cars. Menasse said: "*A la bonne heure!* You are an able woman. That was well done.

Just the same, with this kind of transportation we aren't going to have much fun"; and he began again to issue orders. At the end of an hour the luggage was stowed away, everybody was in his place, the doors of the cattle cars were locked on the outside and, as a measure of safety, sealed. The train rolled on.

They spent three days and four nights in the cattle cars. Penned in with Maria were twenty-seven people, including twelve children. Young and aged, ill and well, they squatted in the dark, evil-smelling cars, going without sufficient food by day and almost without sleep by night, tortured by the necessity of repugnant functions painful to them all. The rattling of the wheels became a murderous noise; the hours of waiting in roadside stations was a murderous silence; the burning zinc roof of their dungeon increased the pestilence. Those who had fever groaned. Every unaccustomed sound brought forth cries of horror. Pressed close to Maria lay the three boys. From time to time she would pass her hand over the face of one or other of them, to see if he were asleep, or if his skin were feverish. She was grateful for their patience and composure, and at the same time worried about their inactivity. Often, she spoke to them; often, too, she turned to Yefim Leontovitch. Most of the time she held Vanya in her lap, washed his little face and hands with *eau de cologne*, and tried to comfort Litvina, who was suffering from vomiting spells. She scolded Arina, who had attacks of hysteria, and said something now and then to her fellow-passengers, or quarreled with the dogmatic Menasse about their distance from the small port on the Black Sea that was their goal. Finally, early one morning, at one of the stations, a

pitying brakeman opened their doors. The air that streamed in was like a new birth, the view that met their eyes was incomparable. Far below lay the sea, so blue that a thousand years of blue skies could be born of it. Round about were the foothills of the Caucasus, with gardens, vineyards, pines, and trees laden with oranges. Nobody spoke; not a sound was heard. Many of these people looked like corpses, with shriveled eyes. They shuddered at the sight of the flourishing countryside, the shore, and the beautiful sea. The door remained open, for it was thought that the danger zone had been left behind. But, a few stations before their destination, Menasse was informed that the city had for two days past been in the hands of the sailors. The name of their leader, one Igor Golovin, was mentioned with fear.

Menasse had his agents in the city, with whom he was able to communicate. Once more, near the railway station, everybody was taken after dark and secretly conducted to an inn on the outskirts of the city. The sick had, like the rest, to go on foot. There were riots in progress in the streets. Shots sounded over the sea.

The square hall onto which opened all the rooms of the inn soon took on the appearance of a trunk room. Porters struggled up the stairs and threw more and more luggage on the chaotic pile. Arms grabbed past one another, each seeking its own belongings. Several little boys had clambered up on a case and were fighting for places. A small dog tripped between the legs of the crowd, sniffing and whining. The banker stood leaning against a wall, smoking a cigarette. Count Dukhorski was negotiating with a dirty waiter. Me-

nasse had lost his eyeglasses; his desperately contorted body was emerging, vanishing, and reappearing as if in a rocky place. From below sounded a shrill trumpet signal. The porters asked to be paid off and seemed in a hurry to get away. Somebody said the harbor had been closed. Somebody else had heard about a German ship cruising out in the waters. There were only eleven rooms, and a noisy quarrel was going on about their distribution. Yefim Leontovitch called from a doorway: "Maria Yakovlevna, come quickly! I have got a room for you." Unable to make her way through the crowd, Maria climbed over the trunks. Menasse stood planted before Yefim and was shrieking at him: "What do you mean, sir! If you don't keep quiet, I'll see that you are made to. We have run straight into a hornet's nest, if you know what I mean. Only God alone can help us, and here is this fellow yelling like mad." Maria said quietly to Yefim: "We ought to try to rescue our thirty pieces of luggage from that mess over there." He nodded and looked solicitously about. "Where are the children?" he asked.

At that moment three sailors came up the stairs. One of them, who was hurrying on ahead, differed from the others in dress and bearing. He wore snow-white linen trousers and a smartly cut jacket. Although he wore no insignia of rank, his bearing was imperious in a brutal and indolent fashion. At his side waddled assiduously the innkeeper, a fat Tartar with a face of putty. The sailor was startled at the sound of the turmoil and the mass of trunks. In the dim light of two villainous oil lamps, the sight was a sorry one. "Who are these people?" he asked the innkeeper.

"What is going on here?" The Tartar looked with scared eyes at Menasse, who squeezed through the mob and tried to put on an air of authority. "Who's this? What's this?" said the sailor harshly and contemptuously. Menasse stuttered. The sailor interrupted him. "There is of course no question of your continuing your journey. The baggage will be confiscated, and we shall look after the rest to-morrow." Paying no attention to Menasse's protest, which had become more gesticulatory than articulate, he turned to the innkeeper: "A room for me." While the innkeeper turned helplessly about, the second sailor said impatiently: "A room for Golovin. Didn't you hear him, pig!" Nearly speechless with fright the innkeeper replied that all the rooms were occupied; the little father could see for himself all these people here. He had available only a garret room with broken windows and a half demolished wall, which he didn't dare offer the little father. Next door, Igor Semionovitch, at Alexis Davidovitch's, there was a beautiful, a wonderful room; with carpets, on his word of honor; with beautiful carpets and pictures on the wall. He was patently afraid to accommodate this guest, and would gladly have been rid of him. But Golovin answered roughly: "Stop that nonsense, you filthy fool. If there's no room now we'll make room. I am not in the mood to bargain about a bed. You'll give me the room next the staircase. That will be all." And he pointed at the doorway in which Maria was standing.

"Pardon me," said Maria; "this is the only room left to me and my children. There are seven of us, and you are alone. We are at the end of our strength, having just come through a dreadful journey. Wouldn't it

be right and magnanimous to put up with the garret for to-night, particularly since you refuse to look elsewhere? I do not know whom I am addressing, but it is certainly a man."

Golovin seemed astonished. He raised his eyebrows in displeasure. "Suavity is inseparable from your kind," he muttered. "You are always ready with honey to pour into the throat of my kind of person. The despised coolie has only to show his fist and you appeal to his magnanimity. We live in a new world, however, madame. Who are you? What are your rights here?"

Maria, for her part, was surprised at this sailor's extraordinary fluency of expression. She had need of all her presence of mind to meet the situation. "I am Maria Yakovlevna von Krüdener," she said in a clear voice, putting her hand meanwhile on the head of Mitya, who had stepped forward as if to protect her. "My husband, a landed proprietor in the government of Tula and an imperial officer, has fled abroad, and I am on the point of doing the same thing. Consequently, I have nothing to hope from you, and much to fear. You are right. The new world order of which you speak begins by affecting women and children. Litvina! Arina! We are going up to the garret."

Golovin looked at her angrily. "You are mistaken, madame," he said, putting both hands into his pockets. "You are mistaken. I am immune to the tricks of high-sounding words. The matter of garret or first-floor suite does not interest me. You and those who accompany you will be tried to-morrow morning before the court-martial. Since you have admitted, with barefaced impudence, that you are planning to escape, you

can guess what your fate will be. We generally make short work of it, being pressed for time, madame. You may stay in this room, if you like. Nor will the other ladies and gentlemen be disturbed, either. Nobody is free to leave the house, of course; but otherwise your liberty is yours until to-morrow." He said this ironically to the circle of frightened and curious people who stood grouped about him. Menasse made swimming motions with his arms in order to ward off those who crowded about him, as well as to draw attention to his own importance. He winked at Golovin as if to let him know that the last word had not been spoken in this matter and that he was confident they would reach an agreement. But Golovin paid no attention to him. He was turning away, when his eye fell on Mitya. "Good-looking boy," he said. "I'm sorry for him; he'll find it hard to get used to all this. Later on, you must become one of our men, my boy. What do you say?" For the first time Maria found herself trembling. Mitya answered with proud indignation: "Never! I shall always be on papa's side." Golovin laughed. "Good stock, madame," he said, looking at Maria. "Good stock and good blood," she retorted. He bowed ironically, but he continued to stare at her with a sharp, cruel, steady gaze, examining her coldly and disclosing more and more patently a definite design. Maria withstood his glance for a time and dropped her eyes only when she noticed the astonishment of the onlookers. Golovin was called by his companions. He turned round as two more sailors appeared on the stairs, dragging between them a struggling individual, the cook of the inn, who had been denounced as a spy. He was supposed to have sent signals from the kitchen

window. Waving his arms in the air, he protested his innocence. The Tartar innkeeper, to whom the terrified cook tried to rush, was lamenting and protesting in absolute futility. Menasse, who in the meantime had been conferring in whispers with Count Dukhorski and the Hungarian baron, went up to Golovin. He tugged at his sleeve and assumed an expression of confidence and familiarity which was not altered by the other man's sinister air of contempt. He whispered. Golovin's silence rather encouraged than discouraged him. Certain that his usual plan was working, he mentioned the sum intended to serve as basis for further negotiations. Golovin put his hand on Menasse's shoulder, and said to the sailor standing by: "What do you think this funny insect here wants, Maxim Maximovitch? He wants to bribe me! Don't you want to tell him what I'm worth? Maybe that chattering tongue of his will freeze in his mouth when he hears my price." Menasse showed signs of violent consternation. This was a new situation, and one for which he was unprepared. The sailors went down the stairs laughing. Golovin was about to follow them, but he stopped on the first step, irresolute.

All this had happened rather quickly, and seemed to Maria to have taken place at some great distance from her. She went into the room, where Eugenia and Arina had made ready the beds for the children. Litvina brought in the hand luggage. Maria sat down in a corner to nurse Vanya, who was crying violently. Mitya stood before her in need of praise: he was not sure that he had behaved properly. "You were a true brave darling, my son," said Maria, whereupon he changed the subject of conversation immediately and

asked where Yefim was to spend the night. Yefim, who was slicing bread for Fedya and Alyosha, signaled Mitya to be quiet. Maria did not answer. Her thoughts had drifted absent-mindedly to Golovin: his manner, his gestures, his piercing eyes, now colorless and now glowing with a metallic luster, his lean swift body, his thin quick mouth with its small white teeth set close together, his rapid enunciation, his voice that rang all the changes with curious virtuosity. She could dismiss from her mind neither the details nor the general impression. Suddenly the door opened and he came in.

She was chilled at the sight of him, as if a cold wind had blown into her heart. Vanya stopped suckling and was kicking angrily. She pulled a shawl up to her throat to hide her breast from indiscreet eyes and looked inquiringly at Golovin.

"I wish to speak to you for a moment privately, Maria Yakovlevna," he said formally.

Maria was puzzled. She shrugged her shoulders. As he stood silent and waiting, she turned to Eugenia with a mute request. Eugenia nodded to Arina and Litvina. Yefim also had understood, and called the three boys. They all went out, while Maria still gazed inquiringly.

Golovin spoke. "Your Jewish intermediary has taken me for a kind of bandit to whom ransom may be offered. I imagine you know about that. If he had been less ridiculous, I should have had him strung up from the sign in front of the inn."

"He is not my intermediary, and I know nothing of his proposal to you," said Maria coolly.

"All the same, madame, your connivance cannot be denied. You all share the danger equally. But how

simple-minded it was to send that unsuspecting Hebrew into the flames. You ought to have prevented it. Or did those eyes of yours see me so superficially? Why didn't you sound me out yourself? That was what I expected. It's no help to you that I have had to come to you instead."

Maria wondered nervously just what he might be driving at.

He paced back and forth several times, his hands in his pockets. Then he spoke again, his voice growing steadily clearer and calmer: "I stood on those stairs and wondered. 'What kind of face is that?' I asked myself; 'What kind of woman is that? Do you know that face? How does it happen that you don't know it?' And then I decided to make advances. You don't like that, do you? I realize of course that I stand for exactly those things you abhor, and abhor with good reason. Nevertheless, here I am. I've come to you with a proposal that is something like an armistice."

"And what is your proposal?" asked Maria simply.

His red, weather-beaten muscular face had become strained. His nerves were keyed up to the highest pitch and this verbal fencing made him impatient. The way in which he rapped out the words lent them a brutal tone: "For your sake, I have been satisfied to take the garret room. I expect you to compensate me for that."

"Compensate you? In what way? What do you mean?"

"I mean that you shall pay me a call up there."

"Pay you a call? I don't altogether understand you."

His face became clouded with anger. "I mean that to-night you will do me the honor of paying me a call," he repeated sharply.

Maria was amused. She smiled.

"It means something to me," he went on, thrusting forth his jaw; "it means a great deal to me, and I'll tell you why. I have set my mind on it, and to try to talk me out of anything that I've set my mind on is futile. Don't even think of it."

Maria smiled. Enveloped in that smile, she was a lady from tip to toe. "You exaggerate my interest in strange notions of compulsion," she said lightly. "I shall certainly not think of it."

He made a catlike movement in her direction. "Is that your last word?" he asked with an unexpected gleam of curiosity.

She nodded. Vanya began to cry. "Why don't you put down that brat," he exclaimed; "he annoys me." Maria stroked Vanya's back and he grew quiet. Golovin looked at her hand, and she hid it hastily under Vanya's cushion.

After a pause, he began: "Very well," he said. "Let us speak in terms of society. What have you to fear?"

"Merely my opinion of myself."

"Nothing else."

"Rather! I cannot put myself in a situation of which I might later have to feel ashamed. Whatever transpires, I shall have to justify it to some one who has a right to demand a reckoning of me."

"Nonsense," muttered Golovin. "That sounds as if I were trying to act out *Boule de suif* with you. I don't throw firecrackers. I'm not merry enough for that." He observed her flash of surprise at his refer-

ence to Maupassant's story but passed it over with a grimace. "Your objections are feeble; moreover, they are not particularly wise. I offer you a pretext that leaves you loopholes on every side. I am bargaining with you about your own fate and that of your children and companions. If you refuse flatly, your fate and theirs is sealed. Therefore, you risk only what anybody would risk who weighs things sensibly."

"But where is the necessity for nocturnal negotiations in the garret?" asked Maria, shaking her head. "Name your conditions, and I will tell you if they are acceptable."

He laughed. "I am sorry, but that is not my plan," he answered mockingly. "If it were a matter of that, I should have done my bargaining with your energetic Israelite. But that is not in my program. The price under discussion cannot be paid in cash. Chance is chance, madame. It would be mere bad taste for me to impersonate Attila before you; but I happen to be dictator of this city and all its souls are in my power, like fish in a bowl. That is how things stand. On the other hand, I realize that an affair like this one between us must be treated delicately, and if you think the pressure I exert on you is not irreproachable, I am willing to make you a promise. I promise solemnly not to come one hair's-breadth nearer you than you shall consider essential to your safety. I shall hold myself to that promise and you may hold me to it. If you still refuse, you will have yourself to blame for the consequences." He turned abruptly and went to the door. "I shall be waiting, Maria Yakovlevna," he said; "in an hour I shall expect you. Do not hesitate too long; the night is short."

Maria gazed anxiously before her. With his hand on the door-knob he turned around, thrust out his chin again and said: "I am a reckless gambler, but an honest one. If you look closely at my power here, you will find that it rests on a rather infirm foundation. I may have to withdraw to-morrow morning with all my men. German troops have been reported. If matters should turn out so, you may get off with a bad scare and I may not have the time to prosecute you. Consider what I stake on the card I have just laid on the table. Think it over. It is worth the trouble." He disappeared.

The children and servants came back into the room, ate but a bite of supper, and lay down heavy with weariness. Yefim had found a corner under the staircase where he slept. Maria threw herself clothed on her bed. There was a knock on the door. Menasse requested an interview and would not be turned away. He had come to ask what she had been talking about with Golovin. The others outside too were waiting eagerly to hear about their conversation. A weight had been lifted from their hearts at the sight of this terrible man's entry into her room. Maria was completely exhausted. She fed Menasse with hopes of rescue in the morning. He answered that she was the only person who could avert disaster. Count Dukhorski wanted to express to her his boundless admiration; all of them expected miracles of her. Finally, Eugenia pushed the last chatterer out of the door.

Maria fell asleep. When she opened her eyes again it was as if by command. Her thoughts were instantly clear and collected. The room was flooded with moonlight. She looked at the clock. Half past eleven.

She must have been asleep three hours. She got up quietly, touched her hair and arranged her dress, took a lace wrap out of a bag and threw it over her shoulders, and left the room on her toes. She went up the narrow wooden stairway, at the head of which was a door. While she stood reflecting, the door opened and Golovin appeared before her.

Silently he invited her in. As the room was not lighted she hesitated, perplexed. But the moonlight was pouring in so freely that every scratch on the floor, every cobweb, was visible. The place was partitioned with boards, not much wider than the window nor longer than the iron bedstead. Besides this it contained only a table and a chair. The partitions were wrecked in places, with loose boards hanging aslant and decayed. There were no panes in the window-frames. Across low roofs reflecting the moonlight one could see the harbor with the moon glittering on the surface of the water.

"If you think it necessary, I will light a candle, although there is but a stump left," said Golovin. "Personally, I prefer this natural light. All the time that I have been waiting patiently for you, my imagination has been busy picturing your face in the moonlight. Romantic, isn't it? I am decidedly a secret romantic. A bit rough on the surface, but most decidedly a romantic inside." He laughed.

Maria stood for a moment, and then reached for the back of the chair. He said: "The chair has only three legs, and even I have difficulty in balancing myself on it. I shall have to offer you the bed to sit on. *I know, that's a funny misfortune*[1] but everything seems to

[1] In English in the original text. (*Trans.*)

point towards danger to-night. We shan't let ourselves be delayed by defective scenic arrangements. Please sit down."

The bedstead was low. Maria sat down, felt herself blushing, and shivered in the cool draft that blew through the window. She pulled the lace wrap close about her and looked silently at Golovin. Her large dark eyes, in which short-sightedness had added a far-away look, were moist and glittering. "Tell me who you are," she said in her brave, frank fashion. "I can't help feeling that you are here in disguise. Are you really a professional sailor? Who are you?"

He sat down negligently on the edge of the table, and crossed his arms. "Well," he said; *curriculum vitæ*, eh? Disguise? No. A bit mixed up? Yes. Or rather, like an onion, with many skins." He cleared his throat and looked out through the window. "I realize that it would be rude not to satisfy your curiosity," he began: "and I shall be as concise as an encyclopædia. Born in Warsaw. Father a Pole with some German blood; mother English, a minister's daughter. Age: thirty-six. Educated at the military academy. Kicked up my heels. Fired out. Drifted about idly; lived with the dregs of humanity. After the death of my parents, left without a cent. Pulled myself together one day, studied electrical engineering; went hungry; moved on to Sweden, then Norway. Shipped on a whaler; spent two winters in the ice of Greenland. Went to Edinburgh; became a mechanic. Went to Iceland and built an electric power-house at Reykyavik. Married a shipowner's daughter. Traveled with her to London. Was infernally cuckolded and made short work of her—a bullet through the head. Beat it in the dead

of night to America. Worked in a steam laundry, on a coal dock at Montreal, in a sausage factory in Chicago, with the Illinois Central Railroad, and finally as draftsman and engineer in San Francisco. Great scandal: seduced two daughters of a lumber magnate; almost murdered by hired assassins; six months in hospital. Went to Paris; reporter on the *New York Herald.* Sent to Petersburg in 1912 and joined the secret societies. Conscripted into the navy in 1914; became confidential man of the crew; helped bring about the revolution; and now"—he bowed in a curious fashion— "I am deemed worthy to deliver this police warrant to my honored guest."

"Much in few words," said Maria, smiling.

"Does the story require many words? As a matter of fact, the events themselves are mere labels that give you no notion of their content. Almost every life, and surely my own, is like a carelessly packed trunk; when you unpack it, you discover that its contents have long lost their importance for you. I am no friend of unpacking; a few locks additional is more in my line."

"You are running ahead of yourself, running a race with yourself," Maria remarked.

"Yes, you say that, but I doubt if you see the picture as it is," he replied. "There was not really one day of rest. Believe it or not, this is the first time in my life that I have enjoyed an hour of talk and reminiscence. My life was like a ship racing with full canvas spread before the storm: one squall after another; here a leak and there a leak; all hands at the pumps, and in the end a desperate jump from the rigging into a lifeboat. I have lived in a sort of sober giddiness, a sort of drunken determination, with

tremors running through my body. Everybody who has stood in my way has been trampled under foot. That is what my life has been like."

"And yet you swallowed a good bit of the world with a hearty appetite," said Maria, showing her magnificent teeth.

"Quite right," he acknowledged, nodding his head. "The world owes me nothing, nor I her; we are quits. I know her from top to bottom: the fragile foundations, the decayed hull, the rusty machinery, the cracked planks, the frayed anchor ropes;—I know her from keel to yards. And as for the crew: diseased brains, a raging fever, a bestial frenzy. It was a capital joke, Maria Yakovlevna, food for the soul. There were times when I would crouch down, happy as could be, beside the overheated boilers, calculating on my fingers how long it would be until the whole pretentious ash-heap blew up with a tremendous crash. Those were really the finest moments of my life. I have something of the prophet in me,—or at any rate, the diagnostician, and that was of some help to me in the navy. A more magnificent setting for an explosion could not possibly be desired. Compared with a battleship, a barrel of dynamite with a lighted fuse is a mere toy. It is instructive to observe how irresistibly such a situation draws the mice to the cheese in the trap. I hovered on the thin ice between promotion and disciplinary measures; and even with the bait of promotion, they could not get me. Why should I snap at their bait? I felt perfectly at home, sitting beside the powder barrel. I was able to predict to my men precisely the date of the explosion. And on that very day, we lowered into the stokehole the captain, the staff officers,

and every other stripe-wearer on board ship. Unfortunately, our hell functioned much too quickly, when you think of the slow hell those fellows had devised for others."

He spoke with entire calm, almost with cheerfulness, in the matter-of-fact tone he might have used to discuss a sporting event, and even with his customary, half-ironical air of boasting. He lit a cigarette, and in the light of the match his face seemed to Maria child-like and innocent. She sat with her hands in her lap, and found nothing to say.

"How lovely your hands look in the moonlight," remarked Golovin; "like white amber."

She started. "You asked me to come here to negotiate with you," she said, frowning; "that was our agreement. I yielded to your whim, because after all it is on your whim that the fate of all of us hangs. Let us come to the point."

"Your impatience about it surprises me," he said with a chuckle. "Be content that I am willing to let my tongue run on. Why are you particularly eager to get to the object of this meeting? Or can you possibly be naïve enough to think that it is a matter of the nutshell and not the nut itself? Did you really come up here with the notion that we were going to play an innocent game of diplomatic chess?"

Maria rose to her feet. "I thought you said you were not the merry kind that plays with fireworks," she said.

"We shan't have to play *Boule de suif*," he remarked cynically. "We might play *Measure for Measure*, for example. There is something that is less merry; in-

deed, its merriment depends entirely on the woman concerned."

Maria was outraged, and her deep, sonorous voice trembled when she spoke: "We have nothing in common," she said. "You are fond of jesting, and I am not in the mood for it. You enjoy dancing around a world conflagration. Why do you choose a partner whose happiness lies in its ruins? What are you after?"

He moved rapidly towards her with raised palms. "Do sit down again. Don't make such a face. Don't draw back; I shan't touch you. Are you cold? Would you like my coat? No, sit still; I'll leave it hanging on its nail. I can imagine that you are repelled by such a coat. I'll overlook that little affectation. And now, listen sharp."

He pulled the three-legged chair forward with quick, awkward movements and balanced himself carefully on its edge, clasped his hands about his knees, bent forward, and thrust forth his chin. All his movements had a certain charm, a clumsy suppleness, a vigorous grace. "It is two and a half years since I have looked a woman in the face," he began with a boyish smile. "In all that time I have not inhaled the atmosphere that pervades women or sensed the enchantment that emanates from them. I have known nothing of the way a woman moves her hands, raises and lowers her eyelids, opens and closes her lips. I have been breathing in coal smoke, have had coal dust pumped into my lungs and pumped out again with difficulty by the salt air. I have lived in the dreary fo'castle, tasted the hot smell of oil in the engine rooms, seen teeth bared and heard oaths muttered. I have allowed the refuse of humanity to pour over me and have lived pent up in

the whining, raging, roaring agony of an immense prison—and now I am hungry. Not hungry in the way you seem to fear. One has after all one's breeding and experience. I am not a bird of prey. I am not a man dying for lack of food—food of any kind. If it were only a matter of that! The table is well enough laden —for the others. But I am hungry with a trancelike hunger, the hunger of a hallucination. Once, in Boston, I attended a spiritualist séance. Into the dim blue light came a ghost, somewhat resembling you, Maria Yakovlevna. You are so lovely, sitting there and listening. Well. I went resolutely for that ghost, paying no attention to the hysteria and contortions of the entranced audience, grabbed the ghost in my arms, and behold, it was a woman, the soft body of a woman. I remember the wave of incredible well-being that went through me when I lay hold of that warm soft body of a woman. The humbug about the ghost didn't in the least interfere with my well-being; on the contrary, it added a sort of diabolical perversity to the situation that pleased me divinely. The way to treat ghosts is to reach out and capture them. And ghosts have surrounded me for a long time."

He smiled again and smoothed his thin, sleek hair. He seemed old, worn out, dissipated. Suddenly he was again taut, elastic, young. After a moment of reflection he went on: "Suppose we talk about the symptoms and causes of fever. Imagine hundreds of men, primitive men. Imagine them spending months in the same place; hundreds of them, completely isolated on the high seas, kept in their place by the knout, bowed by hard service, their instincts and impulses completely throttled. Consider for a moment what hap-

pens when they are released. I know neither horror nor disgust. I take things simply, as they come. They exist; therefore they have to exist. But when one literally wades through the poisonous miasma exhaled by men's souls, the thing gets on one's nerves. There exists in men a degree of privation, of silent, dull, tormenting desire, that transforms everything within them into poison and flame. One might think that physical exhaustion would neutralize that, but it doesn't. The poison and flame spread through the whole of a man, fill his imagination with raging brothel scenes, create in him a dual animal personality, the first drab and hopeless, and the second a feverish heat of memories and desires. I have never believed in tranquil Robinson Crusoes. If such fellows are young, red-blooded, and normally sexed, either they go completely mad or something in them dies. I used to go, for instance, into the sleeping quarters and look at the slumbering men. Here was one bathed in sweat, his forehead wrinkled. Each of those wrinkles was filled with debauchery. That fellow had found his substitute in his imagination, was depraved in his sleep. The most perverted debauchee could not match his inventions. Another lies writhing as if suffering the pangs of puberty; he is as pale as a corpse and drinks his own lips. A third looks as if he were scaling a mountain; he is straining like a taut rope, as lascivious as a monkey. They pant, thrash about with clenched fists, grin greedily, whisper a name, clasp the air, lie in a chaos of burning visions. Another example: we are off duty in the evening and I am sitting among them. They talk, throw banalities at one another, hurl allusion after allusion in a sort of coarse artillery that makes

the ears ring. Before anybody realizes it, the boiling point has been reached. Eyes glitter; tongues whirl. Unimaginable things are said, shouted, and even pictured without shame. They wallow in a pool of heat, overreach themselves, envy one another the most brazen description, the filthiest expression—and yet they are visibly tortured beyond all imagining. Then you see two of them sizing one another up with covert glances. Two men eyeing one another as if they were man and woman. Raving of flesh and lust, getting on handsomely in their inflamed state. And there are others like them. Am I horrifying you? That is not the purpose of my story. I am merely sketching in a black background against which to place my brighter scene. It is when one has been soaked in the lowest dregs that the creatures of heaven seem as white and delicate as lilies in a pestilential swamp. But it takes determination to cleave to the seraphim. You have to succeed first in stopping up the pores against contagion. To surrender too early is what I call killing the unborn calf. The monk who is a secret sensualist becomes an epicure in illusions. Saint Anthony was perhaps the greatest artist of love that we have known. I cannot imagine a more burning aphrodisiac than the torments of voluntary abstinence. It surpasses any revelry on Venusberg. But I am not at all a Peeping Tom. I am merely a believer in cunning aggravation, in enhancement. There, in that witch's cauldron, on that ship, I nursed my longing; I nourished it the way you fatten an animal that promises to provide a delicate dish. And what was I longing for? It is hard to say. A certain smoothness of skin; a certain curve of the fetlock; a certain modeling of the wrist; a certain trans-

parency of the veins at the temples; a certain carriage and gait and appearance. Does that mean anything? It is a matter of odor, of the sense of touch, of the electricity of the nerves. To put it in a word: I was longing for my equal, my equal in sensuality. And there you are, Maria Yakovlevna. It is you I long to possess."

Maria's eyes fell on a scorpion, about the length of a finger, seated motionless on a shelf opposite her. It was graceful, delicate, shadowless, like a Japanese drawing. Gazing at the little beast her heart grew lighter. Somewhere, in a neutral corner of her soul, she was made happy by this delicacy and grace, and she quite forgot its poison and danger. She turned to Golovin and said in a confiding tone: "Isn't it strange? Since you spoke that word I have grown perfectly calm. Now there is no unknown between us. I even feel rather sympathetic towards you. And all because of one insensate, brutal, violent word. Suddenly I have become incomparably the stronger of us two."

Golovin was rather disconcerted. "I don't understand," he murmured.

"You say you want to possess me," Maria continued in the same confiding tone. "I say: very well; here I am; do as you wish."

Golovin stared at her, speechless.

She went on cheerfully: "Can one simply possess a person without further thought about it? Like picking an apple from a neighbor's tree, because it is there, and one wants it? Can one take a woman merely out of desire and because the prey seems worth the bother? Is a woman a mere mouthful, a kind of booty? The pleasure of an idle hour? If you think so . . . help

yourself." Golovin rose and went over to the window, where he stood with averted face. The moon lit up only a patch on the wall.

"Do you seriously imagine that you would really possess me if you took me that way?" Maria went on. "You might destroy me, certainly you would insult and lower me; but possess me? Let us suppose that you accomplish your purpose by force: is it I, Maria Krüdener, or is it not rather a soulless shell of me that you possess? Whether you throw living human beings into stokeholes or make them the victims of chance meetings amounts to the same thing. Possession! what a vulgar word! What does possession mean where there is no giving? Something that is half crime and half imagination, but is in any event a poor, miserable thing."

Still Golovin said not a word.

"I can see that so far as I am concerned, the situation is not very complicated: I am supposed to contribute the payment for the freedom, and perhaps even the lives, of some fifty people, including my children and myself. It is therefore obvious that if you carry out your intention, I can do nothing but agree to your paltry proposal. Very good. It seems to me nothing extraordinary, nothing shocking, in comparison with the great events through which we are living. It is a fate to which I am forced to reconcile myself. Time will absorb it; that is time's function. But is it in this that the new world order, which you mentioned, I believe, is to manifest itself? I am sorry for you. Yours is a primitive and dreadfully commonplace world order."

Without moving from the window, Golovin answered

dully. "You purposely misunderstood me. These are lawyer's tricks. You must be unalterably molded in your capacity as wife to fight with such a display of eloquence against things which stand to reason. My eyes and my nose tell me what's what. It may be that my inner compass has lost the direction a bit; the needle is jumping desperately to right and left, as if it were over the magnetic pole. Nevertheless, I sensed that you were thoroughly and entirely molded, and that was, of course, what attracted me to you. I have to wrestle something away from somebody who stands opposed to me. I have an invisible opponent before me. It will not be easy to come to grips with this phantom. But I smell him; I taste him; I see him."

A wave of hitherto unknown fear ran through Maria's body.

He turned his face towards her and continued: "You speak of him in every look. You walk, stand, sit, as he approves and commands. But you would not have trembled just now, if I had not already succeeded in obscuring your vision of him. You have strength, but you cannot crowd me out; and soon he will be unable to help you. His arms are growing weak already."

"That is idle talk, Igor Semionovitch," Maria said.

"Did you take me for a villainous satyr or a common scoundrel? I know the roads that lead to the secret flames. Who ever said that I wanted to forego the gradual unfolding petal by petal? Or the bliss of winning you bit by bit? Or the surprises and the little bitter-sweetnesses that are the reciprocal charms of man and woman? But perhaps I may be capable (this may be presumptuous) of crowding the enchanting stages into two or three hours, although my indolence and

lack of energy have dragged these hours out so far that the lassitude and the fulfilment now resemble each other no more than a ship just launched resembles a wreck on a sandbank."

"You may be capable of doing what you say," Maria answered, "but you cannot transform one substance into another; you cannot destroy the governance of a life."

Golovin laughed mockingly. "That remains to be seen. It is a question of magic."

Maria was startled. She grew pale and glanced in his direction.

"You talk of chance meetings," he continued. "For my part, I do not believe in them. Are you so firmly convinced that only a chain of inexplicable circumstances brought you into this town, into this house; and that it was not my will, my personality, my decision? But assume that it was chance. We might also by chance have been cast up together on some desert island, to speak again in a Robinson Crusoe vein. How many days would you give yourself until the wedding? Or if that seems to you too brutally direct: how long would your blood remain chill and unresponsive in the presence of a normally built, normally constituted man, even if cunning and calculation prompted me not to stir it? Would you regard it as a triumph to succumb to the delusion of fidelity, to live like a saint in my company? Would you respect an accord by which privations are legalized? that is merely a witness to ownership, a gate barred against intruders, a closed ear, a clenched fist?"

"I don't know how to answer such chicaneries,"

Maria replied; "after all, everything depends on whether the spark that is struck ignites or not."

"Of course," Golovin agreed. He started towards her again, moved into the darkened portion of the room, and leaned against the wooden partition. "Of course. Only we, in our petrified world, have lost the art of igniting the spark. I had a good deal to do, at one time, with the Chinese. There is a race that knows something about these matters. They have been inheriting this art for thousands of years. They smile at our fibs and tricks; they laugh at our clumsiness and lack of imagination, they shrug their shoulders at what we call unhappy love. Just as they have in the East a system by which the weakest men may overcome an athlete and force him to his knees, so they possess an old tradition which endows the initiate with the power to implant physical love in the most obstinate breast. I am speaking of physical love, which is to say, love itself, if we except the vicious European tendency to corrupt nature by investing it with attributes of spiritual radiance. Do you happen to remember the notorious newspaper story of the kidnaping of a young woman in New York some time ago? She was a famous beauty, courted by scions of the Four Hundred, inaccessible, of spotless reputation. One day she disappeared mysteriously, without leaving a trace. Immense sums were offered for information of her whereabouts; two hundred detectives sought her day and night; but it was only after months and months that she was discovered in one of the dirtiest hovels in Chinatown. A number of Chinese were arrested, but the real culprit escaped. The young lady was brought home to her parents, but she was unrecognizable. She

gave no explanation of what had happened, was subject to angry outbursts and spells of depression, and seemed to find it impossible to resume her former mode of life. Doctors and friends were equally powerless to pull her through. While every cure was being essayed, she succeeded in communicating with her kidnapers. Suddenly she vanished again. This time, however, she left a note behind to say that she had gone back of her own free will to her Chinese. American society was of course beside itself; what could be more despicable than a Chinaman? The affair interested me very much. I have no caste or race prejudice, and did not hesitate to make use of my Chinese connections to learn more about this affair which, I later discovered, was not at all unique. To get this information was not easy, for the Chinese are very reticent. Besides, they maintain that in such matters there can be no reciprocal comprehension between them and us. They insist, among other things, that we have no words for the elucidation of their point of view. But as luck would have it, I came upon a wonderful teacher, a fellow as subtle as quicksand and as wise as an old elephant. . . . Are you listening? I cannot see your face distinctly any more. You will not want to know anything of this wisdom and subtlety that leads straight into a labyrinth. And what is the good of my telling you all this if you balk at the mouth of the labyrinth, out of which pours Asiatic voluptuousness. A far different thing that is, too, from our miniature passions and conventional emotions. The essential thing about this mixture of wisdom and narcotic fire is that man has to be emancipated from his fear of his own lower depths. Who among us ever reaches his lowest depth? Not

even the greatest of our criminals. Dostoievski? But even he is terror-stricken. . . . Among other things, my Chinese spread before me a complete philosophy of the exertion and transference of sensual influences. Their mastery over the living instrument is merely a consequence of this philosophy. Their technique is highly individualized but our Western women lose their power of resistance in its first phase. The more highly bred a woman is, the more helplessly she yields. I have read the written confession of such a woman; the most astonishing document I have ever heard of, shameless and daring. She was a distinguished woman, the wife of a professor in Philadelphia, who had eloped with a Chinese servant. She spoke of the rapture of horror, the bliss of oblivion; she said she felt no remorse at the sacrifice of her soul—that Western fraud, the peace of the soul—on the flaming altar that blazed about her, where moments of death alternated with moments of the resurgence of the flesh. That sounds like madness, and, she was, probably in a state of hysteria. It appears, moreover, that she was found a few years ago in a suburb of Pekin, with her head and her right hand cut off. However, all this tempted me to practice what I had been taught, and I must say that the results were not bad; the teachings held good. True, I had not pierced the final secret. What wouldn't I have given for that final secret! But we are too remote from that and to shallow for it. The European is not sufficiently concentrated for that. Dmitri Karamazov says something of the sort, I think. I experimented with many women and found that the most obdurate became as tame as worms. After a short time they would become curiously lifeless, as if certain cells had

been abstracted from their brain with a knife. Force plays no part in this. There is a sort of gliding in, an unobserved entwining about the glowing body of the beloved; meanwhile, one is playing the slave, the inaudible shadow, the indispensable familiar demon, the despised and rejected self, the fiendish, alluring chimæra. And thus one draws the muliercula magnetically into one's arms, and so far in that she can never escape. The caresses are like velvet; the ear, the eyelid, the tip of each finger, the multitudinous surface of the skin, the armpit—each of these is bred and trained in preparation for the appropriate caress, and at each caress it shudders with gratitude. Every nerve in the caressed body writhes gratefully. Each nerve succumbs to its particular lust; each one awakens individually like an exultant, flaming little animal; and what one holds in one's arms is a being free of shame or lies, free of spirit and of fear, as abysmal as the heavens. Maria Yakovlevna," his voice, which had sunk to a whisper, now rang until it seemed like a shout, "when I reach out and grasp your heart, your heart is mine. Enough of stories and reminiscences. They are the echo of a hundred thousand years ago. Yes, I tear open your breast and I see in it no longer the face of another man, no figure, no vow, no image; I see in it only love. Let me burn and wither in it if I must, but give me love!"

The moon had set. The room was in darkness. Maria got up, fumbled for the table and found the candle and a match. When she struck a light, she grew appprehensive, for she saw that the candle would not burn long. "Love," she murmured, "love."

"Why do you kill the word by pronouncing it that way?" Golovin asked her.

"I was only burying the corpse; you have killed it," she answered gravely. "Killed it forever."

"More feeble morality," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "That stroke isn't worth parrying."

Maria began to speak in the deep voice of a story-teller, the voice that lends an illusion of reality to every word it pronounces: "On our estate they tell the story of Petrushka and Nikitushka, two poor peasants who seemed destined to remain forever poor. So Petrushka took to the road and was gone a long time. Finally he returned bringing home a bag of gold. 'Where did you get that gold?' Nikitushka asked eagerly. 'I got it out of the mines,' Petrushka answered, and he began to build a magnificent castle. Nikitushka asked how one got to the mines, set out, and after a while came dragging himself home, worn out. 'I lost my way,' he explained to Petrushka. So Petrushka set out with him, and finally they reached the mountain containing the gold. There Petrushka showed Nikitushka a shaft and said: 'You must go down to the bottom of this shaft and dig for many years.' Nikitushka went down, but he came up again in a little while and said: 'I don't want to dig in the earth for many years. You'd better let me have some of your gold. That will be easier.' 'I can't give you any of my gold,' replied Petrushka. 'I am building this magnificent castle, and if I give my gold to you I'll have nothing left to pay the workmen with. If you'll help me build the castle, I'll give you some of my gold.' "

She stopped.

"I am not impressed," said Golovin, smiling. "Pe-

trushka should have divided the gold as soon as he had brought it home."

"What good would it have done Nikitushka?" Maria demanded with animation. "He would have squandered his share, and would have been as badly off as before."

"Better to squander than to dig laboriously," Golovin insisted, still smiling and gazing at her out of the corner of his eyes.

"A squanderer is a thief," replied Maria. "One must have lived down in the shaft, have dug for oneself."

"One must, one must," repeated Golovin in a mocking tone, while his eyes sparkled. "Haven't I been a Robot in a mine myself?"

"You mined no gold; you didn't bring up Petrushka's gold," Maria countered. She had stretched forth her right arm and seemed to be fending off his glance even more than his words. "If Petrushka asked what you did down in that shaft, your only answer would be: 'Something that hurt you, that poisoned your heart, that made you and your kind suffer.' Petrushka was a builder!"

Golovin said nothing to this. He leaned the back of his head against the partition, still smiling, and continued to observe her out of the corner of his eyes. She was seized by a strange anxiety, a slowly rising, singular flood of shame, that went gradually over her whole person. She wished that she might suddenly vanish from his sight. This feeling grew until she found that she was reproaching herself for having lighted the candle, and was filled with irritation. Her heart was pounding. Her throat and ears were hot. She had no explanation for this condition. Suddenly, without

stirring and as if speaking into the air, he asked: "Do you believe in the end?"

"What end?"

"Oh, I don't mean simply the end of Maria Krüdener and Igor Golovin. I mean the end of Russia and of Europe, of railways and telegraph lines, newspapers and books, art and science and politics; the end of the world; the end of humanity; the end of everything. Do you believe in that?"

Maria lowered her head. After a moment she said quietly: "I do not believe in that. I believe in eternal life."

"Do you believe in a return?" Golovin asked, and his smile grew faint in the candle light.

"What do you mean by a return?"

"Nothing returns," he went on, as if she had not spoken; "and yet every breath in man cries out for the return. Nothing that was shall be again, and yet this return is the most insatiable longing of humanity. Again, again! That is the word that weakens us. Man remains the plaything of fate so long as he has not overcome this urge. And in your case, Maria Yakovlevna, your pride, your estate, your irresistible source through life,—these will never return. They will never return. He will never return."

Maria's eyes were closed. She shook her head and said: "I know as surely as I know that the sun will rise again that he will return."

"There is a confidence in man which fights against his better intuition; that is what is speaking in you. You had the misfortune to make a happy marriage; otherwise you would have been a woman with whom one might have stormed barricades. It is sad to see a being

with the instincts of an eagle reduced to the situation of a setting hen. Everything in you that was noble and born to soar has been squeezed by marriage into a capsule. You don't dare budge for fear of bursting your shell. You have surrounded yourself with defenses, obligations, gratitude, illusions of expansion. You have shut yourself deliberately away from the heights to which you could have risen if you had not been robbed of human liberty. Women like you ought to be commandeered by the state in their youth. Marriage destroys them. It sprinkles sand in their most delicate machinery. And when the great Enemy comes, it will be too late. The great Enemy, the great Commissar of Accounts, the Incorruptible."

Maria said nothing. On her face was a look of indefinable fervor that perplexed Golovin.

"Don't you believe in the great Enemy?" he asked in a veiled tone.

Silently, without a word, she looked straight into his eyes.

"Have you ever pictured Him to yourself?" he went on ironically, his eyes fastened on her. "Surely, you have imagination. Is He not magnetic? intoxicating? seductive? Has He not the air of a great lover? Does He not know all secrets? Has He not penetrated all writings, all conventions, all discoveries and experiences, penetrated them with His lust. The world is filled with Him. He sweeps away the accumulated sweepings."

"Yes, the world is filled with Him," Maria said. "He cries for justice—and murders; He raves about brotherly love—and murders; He oozes pity—and murders; He shouts of progress and renovation—and murders; He kisses and embraces—and murders. He knows no

compassion in His—love." She gazed into Golovin's green, glittering eyes. The candle went out with a hiss.

There was a long silence. Maria's knees shook. She went over to the bed and sat down. That Golovin did not move seemed a sinister omen. Gray light glimmered through the window casement, the first herald of the day. She dared not look. She seemed to be encased in leaden armor.

Out of the silence came his voice: "You are so rich that you could afford to strike one night out of your life. A night not lived by you, but lived over a hundred times by me. I do not mean this night; it is ended. But the next; or if not the next night, then some other. I can wait."

To answer him was a strain. It seemed to Maria that another person dictated her reply: "There can be no such night."

He said: "We are two outposts. We can take one another's measure without any concern for the warring parties. There is a certain grandeur in that. A sacrifice, perhaps, that would make many others superfluous."

"I do not belong to myself," Maria retorted. "Not a hair of my head is mine to dispose of."

"You realize perfectly the cowardice of that argument," he said. "Is there a physical resistance that is unconquerable?"

"I had rather not answer that question."

"Where only the past refuses, and not the present, there is very little room for hesitation between yes and no."

"For the second time to-day, I appeal to your

chivalry." Maria covered her eyes with her hand.

He said: "If you were to put your lips to mine, I could imagine that I was a lad again. I should begin at the beginning. Return, return. Don't be afraid. I shan't stir from this spot. I shall be as chivalrous as a troubadour. But you can do nothing to prevent me from dreaming. I am dreaming that your hand is in mine; that I am touching you ever so lightly with the tips of my fingers. You have forgotten that you are a mother, a wife, a lady, the mistress of an estate. You have forgotten all these infamous dignities of a dead world. You are all hand; nothing but hand. And mine is locked, clasped, in yours—my blood, brain, instincts, soul. You are powerless against it. Tranquil, wonderful, a woman's hand. I breathe into you and you open like the calyx of a flower. . . ."

Maria heard him, all ice inside and out; yet through the ice ran a tepid something that stupefied her. He had not touched her; nevertheless, her hand seemed to be held in a vise. Her thoughts whirled confusedly. Her blood flooded her brain, and then rushed back to her heart. She imagined herself speaking and was suddenly frightened of the word she had not uttered. Mitya's grave eyes were looking at her. Her body seemed to her a strange thing; she was afraid of it. A clock swam into her vision; a dial with hands that would not move. She looked towards the window. "The day is dawning," she murmured. Hurried steps sounded in the street. How good it is that people are stirring, went through her head.

Golovin spoke with a scarcely audible vibration in his voice: "Yes; day is dawning. End of the first act. Curtain. Nobody knows how long the intermission will

last. Doesn't matter. How do you intend to keep me from you hereafter? How shall you break the power I now have over you? You will throw yourself upon your charges, your duties; you will try to solve problems; you will attract people; you will begin to rebuild the wreckage; but I shall always be found in the background of your preoccupations. Neither struggle nor effort can prevail over that."

There was light enough now so that she could see his face. It looked like a gray, spotted rag. She found no words. Contrasting it with her state of depression, she was astonished at his bearing which had a certain ease, almost an air of distinction. From below came the long shrill whistle of a signal. Golovin raised his head like a watch-dog and returned the signal. Immediately thereafter, the thunder of artillery arose in the direction of the sea.

"Time," said Golovin. "Time to lace on one's helmet again." He took the coat from its hook and threw it over his shoulders. "You are free, Maria Yakovlevna," he said with a bow.

"One more word," he added, standing in the doorway. "Pray with all your heart and strength that our paths never cross again."

"No, they must never cross again," agreed Maria.

"Finally, there is no way in the world by which you shall ever regain your peace of soul, except we meet again—and that is to be doubted."

Maria heard his firm footfalls pass down the stairs. She pressed her hands to her breast and raised her face, pale, glowing with piety and release.

When she reached her room, everybody was awake and preparing to continue the journey. Their joy at

the departure of the sailors was so great that they paid no attention to her. Menasse was already negotiating with a skipper, chartering a bark for their crossing. But she recognized the truth of Golovin's words: the way was free, but at the end was impenetrable darkness,

LUKARDIS

In the course of the long drawn out revolution which afflicted the Russian Empire in the last decade but one, a brawl took place in the streets of Moscow. The immediate cause of this brawl was the exile to Siberia of thirty-five students of both sexes, who had been celebrating with excessive exuberance the jubilee of a professor whom they revered and who was the object of police suspicion. A contributing cause was the fact that the preparations for this celebration had been made in a series of secret meetings. Certain of the most highly respected families of Moscow were affected by this harsh measure, and the sorrow and indignation of so many hitherto peaceful citizens created an atmosphere more fraught with danger than if it had resulted merely from the instigation of political agitators.

Among the students deported with such cruel haste was a girl named Anna Pavlovna Nadinsky. She had a brother living in Moscow, Eugene—or, as the Russians say, Evgen Pavlovitch—who was an officer in a regiment of dragoons. Eugene was a proud, handsome young man, twenty-three years old, and apparently assured of a brilliant future. He was exceedingly fond of his sister, who had been his close friend and confidante throughout his life. Seeing her now lost to herself and to the world, a prey to the want and humiliation which the years in Siberia would bring, his sorrow was so great, his sense of justice was so deeply outraged, that the very foundations of his existence

crumbled, and he determined to protest against the institution in whose services he had, until now, been so eager. What followed seemed to happen of its own accord, and astonished him as much as anybody else. A few days after the arbitrary action of the police, his regiment was ordered out to quell a revolt in the streets. Of a sudden he left the column at the head of which he was riding, jumped down from his horse, and ran towards a barricade which had been hastily erected out of paving-blocks, wheelbarrows, baskets, and articles of furniture. As he ran, he gestured frantically to its defenders in a way they could not misunderstand, particularly since desertions from the army to their ranks, even in the midst of battle, were not uncommon. But scarcely had Nadinsky reached the top of the barricade from whose shelter he hoped to fight against the real enemies of his country, when he was struck by two bullets from the guns trained on him by his dragoons. Hands stretched towards him, eyes filled with enthusiasm welcomed him; he seemed to hear a chant of thanksgiving which stilled his last doubts. Even his name was called aloud, as if some of these revolutionists knew him. Despite his weakness, the joy in their voices seemed to him sufficient reward. He turned, drew his revolver, fired upon the assailants, his former comrades, then plunged forward on his face, the fingers of one hand caught in a cane chair wedged into the barricade.

He was seized immediately by two young men who bore his unconscious form away and laid him on the stone stoop of a house near by. Hastily, they ripped open his coat and shirt, bound up his wound, which was bleeding freely, and looked about in search of help. A

pedlar's cart stood at the curb. Its owner had vanished, and its lean little horse seemed frozen in the shafts. Quickly they laid the officer on a bed of vegetables and greens, and covered him with leaves. One of them returned to the barricade while the other led the cart down the street, through numerous alleys, and finally into an open square where stood the University hospital. He went on into the courtyard and called an interne," who gave orders at once to place Nadinsky in one of the wards. His wound was severe. One of the bullets had merely grazed his throat, but the other was lodged in his lung and had to be removed by an operation. On the third day, Nadinsky awoke out of a feverish unconsciousness. It was some time before he knew where he was and what had befallen him.

Meanwhile, all Moscow had been talking of the young officer's desertion, and the police, through one of its numerous spies, had discovered his hiding-place. An Ispravnik turned up at the hospital to arrest the fatally wounded man. Although the critical condition of the patient was clear even to the policeman's eye, he flourished his written order and insisted upon taking Nadinsky away. An" interne" was still arguing with him when the surgeon stepped forward, glanced at Nadinsky's apathetic countenance, was touched by his youth, and said: "If he is removed now he will die within fifteen minutes. The police will do better to wait." The Ispravnik stood irresolute. He was still a novice and not yet hardened. Moreover, in the maze of his multiple orders and commissions, he had lost his head. He thought a while, and then declared himself willing to leave the officer in the hospital until his strength had

returned in sufficient measure to permit of removal.

Thus, a few days were gained by Nadinsky. During these days the surgeon's sympathy for him grew greater, and he made efforts to interest others in the fate of his patient. Friends appeared who were willing to help him escape. One morning he was taken into a private room. In the evening, a young man arrived with an orderly's uniform in which Nadinsky was to be conveyed to Sokolnikin, a park in the environs of Moscow. In his weakened condition, there was still a life and death chance of saving him. Nadinsky agreed to accompany the young man, for to remain meant the certainty either of death or of life imprisonment in remotest Siberia. In the dead of night, amid snow and ice (for it was the middle of March), he was taken to Sokolnikin, where he lived in the villa of a scientist who was presumed to be above suspicion by the police. But twenty-four hours had scarcely passed when messengers appeared from the city who, after strolling casually and unconcernedly about, entered the villa and announced that the police were again on Nadinsky's track and were planning to swoop down and arrest him the following night. No choice remained, therefore, but to seek another refuge. This scientist, who was of German birth, had living with him his sister, Anastasia Karlovna, a woman whose courage was as great as her kindly spirit. She had been living in Moscow for more than forty years, enjoyed a great many influential and benevolent friends in high position, and was, besides, greatly loved by many of the common folk. It was she who kept house for her brother, nursed the young officer, tended him, and arranged cleverly to conceal his presence in the villa. Her first concern was to procure

for Nadinsky a new disguise. Having attired him as a laborer, she conveyed him, with the aid of a total stranger who had offered his services, to the house of a wood-turner in the suburbs. He was able to remain there only the night, for by morning the wood-turner had become fearful for himself and his family, and refused to harbor the fugitive any longer. Nadinsky was dragged in this way for five days from one house to another, to a coachman's, a widow's, a gardener's, and finally to a laboratory worker's. Each time, at the end of a few hours these people realized to whom they were giving asylum. Fear of the police outweighed considerations of pity and hardened them against the eloquence of Anastasia, whose zeal never flagged. She spent her nights with Nadinsky, for he was not in a condition to be left by himself. He had to be washed, dressed, and have his bandages changed twice a day; the irregularity and excitation of his mode of living prevented his wound from healing rapidly. And now that the laboratory worker, who had been plied with gold and eloquence, refused any longer to shelter Nadinsky, Anastasia Karlovna feared that there was nothing more to be done. Those friends who had stood by her until now could do no more; the police were on their track and every fresh step led in the direction of their ruin. Anastasia herself felt that she was being spied upon and was menaced. She tried for the last time, by prayer and entreaty, to soften the laboratory worker: would he not practice Christian indulgence for only one night more? The life of her brother—for so she represented Nadinsky—was at stake. But her words served only to increase the man's distrust of the business, and she secured merely a respite of three hours.

If, at the end of that period, Nadinsky had not been removed from the house, the man would go to police.

It was now three o'clock in the afternoon. By six, therefore, Anastasia would have to find another hiding-place for her ward. She drifted for a time through the streets, stopping first before one house and then another, but turning back each time at the door in fear of an unfavorable response, or even of betrayal. At last, in her distress, she fell back upon the idea of taking Nadinsky to one of those assignation houses in which rooms are let out to lovers. In such a place only could she introduce a man who carried no passport. Given two days of rest and care, he would pull through, the doctor had told her that morning. Thereafter, he could get to the frontier by himself.

But to carry out this plan she would need an accomplice, a creature who could make the love-affair seem plausible, who was strong, discreet, and intelligent. She thought of all the young women she knew, but none of them seemed suited to such an undertaking. Anastasia had no friends among the revolutionists; moreover, it would be folly to confide in a person who might be under police surveillance. Nor was it possible to consider a woman of the lower class, or any woman to whom one might offer money; it had to be a lady or a girl of good family.

The exertion of the past few days had wearied her. Rather more to be seated somewhere than for refreshment, she went into a little pastry shop and stepped into a twilit back room. Two women sat at a small table, drinking chocolate. Anastasia took a seat absent-mindedly, but she saw presently that the elder of the two women was looking in her direction and greet-

ing her with a friendly nod. She recognized the woman as Anna Ivanovna Schmoll, the deaf-mute wife of a retired general. With her was her daughter Lukardis, a nineteen-year-old girl of unusual beauty. Scarcely had Anastasia glanced at Lukardis when she said to herself: there is the only girl who can do it. Years before she had been a frequent guest at the Schmolls', when Lukardis Nikolaievna was a little girl. She had often played and chatted with the child and remembered her well. She remembered that, already at the age of thirteen, this child had impressed her as do only those people who possess a peculiar quality, a peculiar strength. What sort of quality or strength that was, she had never been able to fathom, much as she had reflected upon it. The mother, Anna Ivanovna, was a rather simple-minded person, pious, apathetic, harmless, conscious in a vague way of her infirmity.

Anastasia took a seat at their table and, having inquired by look and gesture about the health of the general's wife, began to speak to Lukardis Nikolaievna in a low tone. The general's wife looked inquiringly at Anastasia's lips, but, unable to follow the conversation, she lowered her eyes modestly and refrained from interrupting their speech by any sign of curiosity. Anastasia was conscious of the boldness of her design, and anxious about it. She had no time to lose. It was essential that she speak briefly. In a few sentences she had to tell her story, make an extraordinary demand, arouse Lukardis's innermost sympathies, and at the same time move with care and cunning, for one word, one awkward gesture, could frustrate the whole plan. Lukardis knew nothing of revolutionary intrigues. She suspected much, but she had no information about these

matters. She lived in a sphere of gentle dreaming, with the dolls of her past and the jewel-cases of her present, with echoes of the comical gallantries of married men and the careful protestations of scented, unmarried men. Yet, there was something in her of the young animal in the forest that listens to the sound of the distant hunt, the tremendous commotion of pain and blood and death. She was ready for action, but unaware of her expectancy. There were moments when she was seized by a vehement unrest, an unreasoning desire, an impulse to escape from the realm of hypocritical calm in which her life was taking shape. But she was afraid of the world, of people; she trembled at each strange hand that was stretched forth to her. It seemed to her that everything that lay outside her home, even outside her room, was troubled, soiled. She never overheard people in conversation in the street without a shudder; never opened a newspaper without the sense that, side by side with all that was savage and mysterious to her in the outer world, there was something unclean, something that would soil her. Even the books she read, a snatch of verse, a street song, a jest, awakened in her this terrible, unconquerable impression.

Motionless, she listened while Anastasia spoke. There was no lure for her in the story; she felt no girlish impurity or lust for excitement. All that she could read in the stern features of Anastasia Karlovna was a call to duty. She had no decision to make. What there was for her to do was immediately and unalterably clear to her.

Lukardis had been engaged these six weeks past to a Petersburg nobleman, a privy councillor named Alexan-

der Mikhailovitch Kussin. Her parents and their friends felt that as the wife of this rich nobleman an enviable future lay before her; and indeed she herself was happy about it. If anything could make her hesitate, it was the thought of him to whom she felt herself bound by a sisterly affection. But when Anastasia, who divined her preoccupation, suggested that she might be tranquil on this point, she wrinkled her forehead and replied that she did not need this assurance. Her fiancé, she said, would never dream for a moment that she might do anything evil or ugly.

"I take it, then, that you have made up your mind to do it," said Anastasia in a low voice, her gray eyes fixed on the girl.

"I have made up my mind to do it," Lukardis answered in an equally low tone without raising her eyes. "But there is one difficulty—."

"Can there still be a difficulty when one has made up one's mind?" Anastasia interrupted sharply, with a note of fanaticism in her voice.

"But how am I to explain my remaining away from home for two days and nights?" asked Lukardis, crossing the fingers of her white hands.

Anastasia stared, gloomily pondering, at a plate of cakes.

Lukardis went on in a whisper. "The only thing possible is to disappear quietly, to leave a letter for mother—."

"Yes, yes. A few lines. Anything. And beg them to keep it secret. Say you will explain everything on your return. But you too must be silent, Lukardis Nikolaievna," she added almost menacingly. "You must be as silent as though it had never happened."

Lukardis merely nodded. Her eyes were now wide open and gazing straight in front of her. Anastasia explained down to the last detail how she was to dress and act. After telling her where to come and at what time, she added to their serious conversation—which despite its gravity had lasted but a quarter of an hour—a few jesting remarks, in order that Lukardis might smile and divert any suspicion which might have arisen in the mind of her mother. Then she arose with a lighter heart and went her way.

She returned to Nadinsky and told him what she had planned. He lay on a sofa in the wretched room of the laboratory worker, and pressed her hand. "My life," he said, "is no longer worth such great effort, Anastasia Karlovna. It is a lost life." She retorted that she had hoped for livelier thanks than were contained in these spiritless phrases, and set about changing his dressing. Nadinsky sighed. "What is the use?" he said in a tired voice. "Everything about me is changed, eye, hand, and emotions. I seem to be surrounded by ghosts. I do not seem to mind being cut off from the world. I can see my mother on our estate. As yet, she suspects nothing. I see her opening a locket and looking at a picture in it. It is a picture of me. She does not know that she will never see me again, she has no idea of that, and yet she sheds tears on the locket. But I have no feelings whatever. The world is to me unreal, because I can no longer love anything."

To Anastasia, these words were the ravings of a feverish mind. She shook her head indignantly. After a while, when it had grown dark, a carriage drove up before the door. Anastasia had bought some handsome

clothes for Nadinsky, had helped him with his toilette, and now she looked at him critically before once more escorting him downstairs. In the carriage sat Lukardis Nikolaievna Schmoll, heavily veiled. Anastasia handed her a package of gauze bandages, and said to Nadinsky that she would be waiting for him on the second morning thereafter at a certain hour and at a particular place in the railway station. Meanwhile, she added, she would set about procuring him a passport to foreign countries. She gave an address to the coachman, waved her hand in farewell, and the carriage drove off.

Lukardis and Nadinsky sat in silence. Their situation was too unreal, too threatening, too fateful for embarrassment. When the occasional street lamps lit up the interior of the carriage, Lukardis saw that Nadinsky's eyes were closed and his face was pallid. He had given her his hand on first sitting down beside her; that was all. She discovered that his proximity was not frightening her and that silence was easy.

The house to which they drove stood in a remote street. Nadinsky had to summon all his strength to get out of the carriage. He offered Lukardis his arm, but it was rather she who supported him than he her. He asked for two rooms, and was received with great assiduity. Dragging himself with an effort up the stairs, he strove to preserve the air of a man of the world engaged in a passing adventure. In accordance with the custom of the house, a servant was placed at their especial disposal. This person, suffocating in silver-embroidered livery, had malicious pop eyes, wore an unvaryingly insipid smile on his thick lips, and was obsequious in his humility. Lukardis felt her heart

contract at his glance. He set the table and stood listening in a doglike manner while Nadinsky, exhausted and indifferent, ordered the dinner, the wines, the champagne. His appraising glance seemed to insist that they be really what they pretended to be. Lukardis was rouged and wore a low cut gown. It was difficult for her to be anything else than herself. She was forced to put off the childlike innocence which shone ordinarily in her face and put on an air of frivolity. She had to chatter, coquette, laugh, throw her arms about Nadinsky, and sit from time to time on his knees. She had to sketch passionate, wanton, seductive gestures. All those things that she had never noticed, never wished to see, never thought about save with horror, known only through careless words and pictures, the things from which she had hitherto averted her mind and her eye, she had now to do in order to deceive this man who came in with plates, bowls, glasses, and bottles, who chilled the champagne, served the food, and then, silently, smilingly, spying from under lowered eyelids, awaited further orders. She had to fit herself into the voluptuous lights, the multicolored cushions, the mirrored walls, for this house with its sham and glitter put her mind in a tumult. Nor was that all. She had to act so as to arouse no doubt about the reality and naturalness of her behavior. Everything had to be done casually, cunningly, and transparently, with no overt shudder or haste. She had to eat what was set before her, to drink the wines placed before her, and not only the wine in her glass but, when the waiter was out, in Nadinsky's, too, for he might neither drink nor leave his glass filled. She was entirely unaccustomed to drinking, and it filled her with fright and

depression to have to continue in this rôle which she played instinctively and out of a spirit of self-sacrifice. Whenever the waiter left the room she got up. The terrific tension that strained the muscles of her face gave way to an expression of bewilderment and even of frightened recollection, for it seemed to her that many years had elapsed since she had driven away from the home of her parents. Nadinsky gazed at her in pain and astonishment, sought her as behind a mask, pitied her dumbly, accused himself in a gesture,—and then, with an effort, brought back the studied smile to his lips and continued his acting when the fellow returned.

After the table had been cleared away, a maid came in, wearing a little white cap. She was young, but she appeared old. Her face had grown gray from this life in lamplight and in badly aired rooms. She brought water, tended the fire, asked if there was anything else she could do. Her voice was sweet, but her features were stony with hatred of the upper world, hatred of those who came to this house to indulge themselves in contemptible, quickly snatched pleasures. Lukardis's knees trembled whenever her glance fell on the maid. She was ashamed of her feet, her hands, her neck, and her shoulders. At last this trial too ended, and she was able to lock the door. They were alone. A clock in a tower somewhere struck ten, its tones vibrating through the apartment. Nadinsky went into the adjoining room where stood a double bed over which was stretched a blue satin counterpane. Bereft of strength, he fell upon the bed, and it was only after he had rested thus a quarter of an hour that Lukardis could help him undress. The cover drawn half way up, he lay there with his chest bare. This is a human thing, said

Lukardis to herself. Suddenly the tears started in her eyes and she thought with a kind of fright of the red-cheeked face of Alexander Mikhailovitch, her fiancé. She bathed Nadinsky's wound and bound it. As in a dream one sees perfumes, so Nadinsky saw her delicate hand. He was incapable of thanking her. He was afraid to catch her eye, afraid that a glance of gratitude might offend her. He wished that she might be able to look upon him as nothing but a body, a thing devoid of feature and of feeling. And while Lukardis, half shocked and half in pity, was thinking—a human being! he, half blissful and half in fear for her, thought —an unearthly being!

He fell asleep. Lukardis sat motionless in an armchair. She had brought a book in her little bag, but she knew she would be unable to read. She tried to think of her mother, her father, her friends, the last ball, of the opera she had last heard, but she could think of nothing. Everything faded out, everything eluded her. She heard Nadinsky's deep breathing, saw his pale, fine face, wearied by pain,—but he too, he whom she was to tend and guard, seemed out of reach of her thoughts. It was as if miles separated her chair from his bed. She heard tittering on the stairs and shuffling steps in the hall. Voices, women's voices and men's voices, pierced in muffled tones through the walls, from above and from below. Glasses clinked. Then came the sound of a waltz played on a piano with, doubtless, one string missing, for at a certain point there was a hole in the melody, like a gap between two teeth in a smiling mouth. Shrieks arose. The piano was silent. Beyond the wall to the left arose a creaking, and then a sighing note at the sound of which

Lukardis's blood curdled in her veins. The smell of perfumes came in from the locked rooms; garments rustled; doors banged open and shut. Every sound called up a picture from which she could not turn away. She trembled, yet, trembling, she had to look. She had never imagined that the world was like this, that this was life. Encounters in the darkness, strange hands clasping one another, forms reeling against suddenly illuminated mirrors, consent given in shameless words, the unknown unveiled, the crypt of mystery emptied, the consecrated soiled, the secret treasures of the imagination cheapened. She covered her face with her hands; the blood rushed to her rouged cheeks and her heart filled with horror.

Nadinsky opened his eyes and moaned. She walked the many miles to his bedside and held forth a glass of water. His forehead was hot. She put a damp cloth over it. At that moment he awoke and began to speak. He spoke in broken sentences of the hospital, the surgeon, Anastasia Karlovna. Whenever he paused, Lukardis interjected a timid word. He said: "To-morrow I shall be strong enough to leave here!" to which she replied: "That is impossible. You are still feverish. Besides, Anastasia Karlovna is not expecting you until the morning after, early, at seven o'clock." These softly spoken words seemed suddenly to show him her soul, her hitherto unclouded youth, her strong clean instincts; but he could not see that she had not stopped trembling. Once more the piano was being played, but this time by a different hand, a rough, riotous, drunken hand. Throughout the performance Nadinsky and Lukardis gazed in torment into each other's eyes. It was past midnight. Out of the silence that fell came a

hollow knocking at the street door. Nadinsky half raised himself. His fingers stiffened and his face was full of dark expectancy. Lukardis stood up and listened breathlessly. It was long before the door was opened. Steps sounded on the stair. They gazed in fear at the latched door, waited for the knock that was to decide their terrible fate. Voices reached them from the hall in a hurried exchange of words. Then all grew calm again and their pulses commenced once more to beat regularly. In these three or four minutes they felt themselves strangely united, their strength and their fear were directed against a common enemy. It was as if they had been lifted into the air by a hurricane, propelled against one another breast to breast, and had thrown their arms about each other in order to help avert the crash that threatened. Lukardis forgot herself; Nadinsky forgot himself. He felt only the intensity of her fear, the forfeiture of her happiness, the shame and the misery of her. She, for her part, was thinking courageously of his fate, realizing now for the first time why his life hung in the balance.

Meanwhile sleep had once more overcome the feverish man. But he could not sleep soundly while the glaring electric lights shone upon him. He said nothing about his desire for darkness, out of consideration for Lukardis, but she saw the nervous flicker of his eyelids and guessed what the matter was. She lighted a candle in the adjoining room and switched off the lights. She too was weary. The late hour was like a paralyzing poison, and she sought a place to lie down. There was no bed in this room, merely a sofa, whose plush covering filled her with repugnance. She was repelled also by the chairs and the carpet. She rolled back the

carpet from the threshold of Nadinsky's room, spread her fur coat on the floor, and lay down. The candle still glowed, but it seemed to bring nearer to her each sound in the house that had until now been vague—a call, a laugh, a single word. And she heard also the beating of the snow on the window-pane; its mildly crackling noise quieted her. She heard the breathing of Nadinsky, and was reminded of her responsibility. Each breath chained her more closely to his destiny. The things that had once been significant became meaningless to her; what she had done, wanted, and been in the course of her life now seemed childish and frivolous. She gazed back longingly, as from the deck of a ship, to the home that faded into the distance. She was asleep, and yet not asleep. Nadinsky had spoken words of comfort and encouragement to her—that was a dream; his throat had rattled feverishly—that was a fact. In dream she bent over him, nursed him; in fact she was chained to the floor, listening to the Bacchic cry of a woman. In the gray light of dawn she saw a rat running across the carpet. It seemed to her fantastically large, and moved, she thought, like a ghost. She rose to her knees and sought the sky in the parting of the curtains, but all that she could see was a vague blot of gray and below it a window out of which peered an angular face. There was a second of crushing helplessness, and then she crept, nay fled, to Nadinsky's bed. His right arm was hanging limp. Beads of perspiration stood on his forehead. He looked frighteningly strange. A painful sense of hatred flared up in her. Yet there was no longer anybody in the world at whom she could look in this fashion. She had

much to demand of him, everything, in fact; except for him, her world was but this house.

They had said nothing on their arrival about how long they wished to remain in these rooms. It was customary to let them only for the night. Anastasia's plan had been that they should lock themselves in until noon, and then declare their wish to spend a second night in the house. A gold-piece to the waiter and another to the chambermaid would suffice for this. But fresh water was needed for Nadinsky's wound; his condition demanded nourishment. If they arose early, how were they to justify staying all day? Nadinsky, who had been lying open-eyed and silent, was the first to broach this subject. He asked her to hand him his coat, drew out his wallet, and gave it to her. Two gold-pieces, he thought, would not be enough; fifty roubles would be better. Lukardis remarked that such extravagance would create suspicion and induce the proprietor to spy upon them. She held the note between trembling fingers. Never had money seemed to her at once so real and so incomprehensible. They were behaving with outward coolness, but their voices seemed smothered. Lukardis said something about the nastiness in the waiter's face, which induced Nadinsky to retort, more spitefully than he intended, that she had certainly led a life excessively sheltered in cotton-wool, since none of these people who lived in dirt and squalor could please her. He was revolting against the yoke of gratitude which she had laid upon him, and at the same time, trying to draw her out of herself and let light and darkness play about her features. But she gazed sadly at the floor. She granted his point, and thus disarmed him. Her gentleness touched him,

but also it goaded him into further cruelty. He protested against the idea that chance alone was responsible for making her his companion during these twenty-eight hours; she seemed to him herself guilty of the humiliation she was suffering, and he was angry with her because of that. He thought of her as having worn, before she met him, only robes of purest white, as having spoken, with those beautiful lips, only meaningless words, the dregs of her pampered class. It was only now, beside her, that he became a true revolutionist. His flight and concealment seemed to him now ignominious, and he imagined that very likely they lowered him in Lukardis's eyes. And therefore he declared suddenly his determination to get up and leave the house. He was trying to show her that it meant nothing to him, indeed, it was his duty, to share the lot of so many of the condemned, who had accomplished more and dared more than he. Once across the frontier, to whom could he be of use? Not to the Russian people, not to his friends, not to his unfortunate sister!

Lukardis begged him to control himself and tried vainly to reason with him, though she had only a child's reasons to present. Then, seeing that he remained obdurate, she assumed a tone of command and the air of a young queen. Of a sudden she was silent. She had heard steps. She raised her finger and pressed it to her lips. Some one stood listening at the door. Her proud glance became a plea for protection, and Nadinsky hung his head. Then Lukardis accepted the inevitable. She tiptoed to the door, unbolted it, hurried back to the bed, and slipped quickly in beside Nadinsky. Pulling the covers up under her chin, she reached for the

electric bell-cord and rang. They lay breathless until a knock came. It was the maid. She stood in the doorway with an air of Nornlike gloom and took Nadinsky's order to bring fresh water and call the waiter so that breakfast might be ordered. Back she came with two jugs of water, followed by the waiter. His watchful eye took in the first room and as much of the next as it could see, and to Lukardis it appeared as if he were seeking the clothes she wore as she lay in bed, a circumstance she thought proper to arouse his suspicion. She shut her eyes, for the sight of this man was horrible to her. Nadinsky held out the fifty-rouble note. "Twenty for the maid and thirty for you," he said in a tone of studied indifference. "We shall stay until to-morrow morning, if it can be arranged." The waiter bowed nearly to the ground. He had not looked for so generous a tip. The maid, who was feeding the fire, came over and tried to kiss his hand, but Nadinsky warded her off. "If it please the lady and gentleman, and there is nothing against it," said the waiter with a catlike gesture and a wink. Nadinsky ordered breakfast, and at the end of a quarter of an hour the tea and things were brought in. Meanwhile, Lukardis lay on coals of fire. Her whole body was penetrated with something for which she found no name, a feeling composed of grief and fear, that clouded her face with a deathly pallor. Nadinsky lay motionless, sharing her sensation. He understood her agony and averted his eyes from her. The waiter had set the table, bowed again to the ground, and left. When the maid had gone, Lukardis threw back the cover and rose as if fleeing from flames. She bolted the door and opened a window. Her hair had come unbound, and she let it

hang freely, for it covered her bare shoulders. An hour earlier she would have resented appearing thus before Nadinsky, but since she had lain beside him, uncovered despite all covering, immeasurably his, her blood now revolted at the notion of his mercy. It was no longer improper that her hair hang loose about her shoulders.

When the room was filled with fresh air, she shut the window and said to Nadinsky that it was time to change the dressing. Silently, he uncovered the sheet. Even to Lukardis's untrained eyes it was clear that the wound was healing rapidly and that Nadinsky's fever had passed. She was already more adroit than yesterday in the dressing and the binding of the wound. When she had finished, she offered him bread and milk. He asked to have a little tea in his milk, and she gave it him. She herself swallowed something in great haste, as if she begrudged her body its hunger. The house was strangely silent. In the street, wagons rolled and children shouted. Nadinsky fell asleep, and Lukardis went into the other room. She pulled off her slippers in order to make no noise, and walked back and forth for hours, holding the strands of her hair in both hands. From time to time she would stand still and muse. Then she would stare at the pictures on the wall without really seeing them. One represented a Leda, holding the swan between her knees. By the door hung another: a German student with a rucksack on his back, flourishing his cap in the direction of a girl with two long braids, looking out of a window. The two rooms were reflected on both sides in the mirrors with the effect of an endless succession of rooms, all of them peopled by the fat, ugly nakedness of Leda, the senti-

mental student, the bed in which Nadinsky lay asleep, and the portrait of Czar Nicholas that hung above it. Endless, multiple reflections, far into the dim, dim distance. Often, too, she would stand at the window and look at the vehicles and the children, at the snow on the ledges and the faces seen faintly behind window-panes, and it would seem to her that all this, too, was endlessly repeated in the faint distance. Where had the world vanished to? Where was everything she had loved, embraced with harmless affection? Where was she herself, Lukardis, who had spent her life in the elegant boudoir of a general's daughter? Where was Alexander Mikhailovitch, ever ruddy and ever smiling? And where was brilliant Moscow with the tempting displays of its shops, the friendly acquaintances who turned up on every hand, the distinguished young officers and the gay women? Where had the world vanished to? She could see only the man who lay before her in the many mirrors of the many rooms; she could see only his wound on his white skin, his wound that was like a flitting flame which she, with an enchantment put upon her, was forced to follow.

The chimes struck twelve, and it was a long time thereafter, how long she could not judge, before Nadinsky awoke. He sat up, and she came forward with some hesitation. More determinedly than she had expected, he said that she must leave this same evening. He felt strong enough now to stay alone and would intimate to the waiter that she would be back later in the night. And in the night, nobody would bother to think about it again. Lukardis shook her head and said that it was as much for her own sake as for his that she preferred to stay. The scar had only just

begun to form, and the wound would need to be dressed at least twice again before he could stir. If she left and he met with an accident, she would never forgive herself. Nadinsky gazed searchingly into her face; then he stretched forth his arm in such fashion that she held out her hand to him. At that moment they both grew frightened. It was like some blissful but disastrous transformation which each underwent in the eyes of the other. Then Lukardis stepped with beating heart before one of the mirrors and pinned up her hair. Her fingers shook. If at this moment he had ordered her to leave, she would probably have gone without protest. But instead he began to lament that he had not died an honorable death in battle; what was he to do in foreign lands, eternally wandering, gnawed by grief and by the ever-present thought of his tortured comrades, worried by the business of earning a bare living? For he was not rich. He had many debts. His mother's estate belonged to his creditors, really. Discouraged by so much discouragement, Lukardis stood still before the mirror and examined her tired face. He went on. He reviled his deed: he had not known what he was taking upon himself; it had been the result of impulse, not of decision; heroes did not act this way, did not deliver themselves up to chance, in order to be crushed. And here was she who had fled with him to this sewer: had she acted with a clear sense of what she was doing, or had she not, in reality, allowed herself to be swept away by sentiment, by pity, by the temptation of the unusual, the seduction of an enthusiastic friend? Had she not been uprooted and shaken, robbed of all her strength by Medusa-like visions? "So are we all," he cried, throwing himself back upon his pillows; "all of

us, delivered up, cast down, beggars of fantasy, sacrifices to the moment, deceived by our actions!"

Lukardis moved over and sat on the edge of his bed. Quietly and firmly, she looked into his face. Her eyes gave the lie to his words; there was a soulful harmony in the expression of her features. It was as though, in the simple silence of bewilderment, a godlike nature had come to the aid of its heart. A beam of happiness sped across Nadinsky's brow. His skeptical spirit bowed in shame before the confidence and serenity of this girl, who was able to take him out of himself, out of this house. Night fell. They sat in silence amid the darkness. When it came time to continue the comedy demanded by their situation, Lukardis switched on the light, drew the curtains together, and went out of the room in order that Nadinsky might dress. He called to her after a moment to help him on with his coat. Dinner was served as on the previous evening by the liveried waiter, with even more humility, with a smile even more insipid and an eye even more alert behind his evil grimaces, than before. They sat at table mirthlessly and avoided one another's glance. Only their hands moved,—mute obedient spirits, passing to and fro, pretending a casual innocuousness under the eyes of the spy. This evening Lukardis was playing her part badly. Her laughter was artificial, her frivolity was even less convincing. Nadinsky came to her rescue by whispering, when they were alone, that they should pretend to quarrel. He invented the name of a Countess Shuilov and insisted that the collar of pearls she had worn at Princess Karamsin's last reception was false. Lukardis contradicted him. He persisted peevishly in his opinion, and with such success that a

crimson glow overspread Lukardis's cheeks. She was astounded at this hypocrisy within hypocrisy and suddenly was afraid of Nadinsky. The waiter came and went, poured champagne, with a look in his face that seemed to implore them to be friends, as if he were afraid of anything else than dovelike cooing. Finally Nadinsky got up ill-humoredly and ordered the waiter to clear out. He was amazed by Lukardis's pleading glance. Acting as though he regretted his impetuosity, he stepped towards her with outstretched hands. The waiter grinned with joy. Lukardis too stood up. She let her head fall on his shoulder, but only in order to whisper to him not to forget that the carriage must be ordered for the next morning.

All at once a piercing shriek resounded through the house, followed by a second and then a third cry. Lukardis clasped her hands in fright while Nadinsky looked uneasily in the direction of the door. The waiter stood with a metal tray in the open doorway. A half naked woman ran by. "Shut the door," breathed Lukardis faintly. A shot sounded and the ghastly howl of a man filled the air. Nadinsky pushed the servant out and slammed the door. In a few minutes all was quiet; then steps ran to and fro, voices murmured, a tone of command arose from below and was answered by a wail of lament from above. This was followed by sobs so heartrending that Lukardis ran, wringing her hands, to the sofa, and flung herself face downward upon it. A lively tumult arose in the street, in the midst of which the voice of a policeman was clearly audible. Heavy feet through the hall indicated that some one was being carried out. The waiter came in with a look of contrition in his face and said: "I beg

your Excellency to be without anxiety; I beg the lady to calm herself. It is nothing. An insignificant accident has occurred. Your Excellency will not be disturbed again." With this he vanished.

Nadinsky went over to Lukardis and sat down beside her, stroking her hair with a trembling hand. She shrank from his touch and moved her head away. He withdrew his hand, weary of life. A storm rattled at the windows. As if in defiance, the piano sounded again; some one was playing the same waltz, the same gap-toothed melody. Was it only one day, one day and one night, since they had last heard that air? Had not years elapsed? years filled with images and moods, joy and pain, splendor and wretchedness, expectancy and disappointment, greed and deprivation, dream and death? And was this already the end? Was not another night imminent? An endless, mysterious night? To Nadinsky it seemed that in the moment when he had climbed the barricade and been shot, he had stepped into another existence, conditioned by hitherto unknown laws and demands; and that his earlier existence with all that it comported had been shed like a cloak; that on coming into this house he had taken upon himself his destined life, divorced from past and future, devoid of bridges leading either backward or forward.

Oppressed and nerve-racked, he fell upon his bed. Lukardis came in. A lamp burned in the sitting-room, but in this room there was no light. The rooms repeated themselves in the mirrors, gray and vague. Lukardis found that one jug of water was still full, and again she dressed Nadinsky's wound. In drawing the fresh bandage from her bag, she pulled out a book,

and when Nadinsky had been bandaged he asked if she would read to him. The book was a volume of Lermontov's poems. Lukardis, in her chair, had read only for a few minutes when her arms fell to her sides, her head sank, and sleep overcame her. Thus, without resistance or transition do children fall asleep. Nadinsky was careful not to stir. His eyes clung to her face, and it seemed to him that his own face must follow the change of expression to which her features were being subjected. A sense of ineffable peace entered his soul. He stretched his legs and breathed deeply, as in a garden. Her lips were moving. She was whispering, smiling gently. Her hands opened and the book fell from her lap. She started, opened her eyes, glanced in horror at the dim room, and slept on. Sleep mastered her completely and her body lost its equilibrium so that she would have fallen to the floor had not Nadinsky caught her in his arms. He laid her across his bed, her feet on the chair. Her head rested on his knees, her arms were crossed above it, and her breast rose and fell in a powerful rhythm. Gradually Nadinsky commenced to feel her weight; the blood ceased to circulate in his thighs, and it was hard for him to remain motionless. He let himself fall back on his pillows, slipped his hands under the covers and under the girl's back, and tried thus to hold up the unconscious body. In this way the burden fell in rotation on the arms, the thighs, and the knees. A glow of happiness went through him. He felt that he was repaying her care and trouble, and also he was happy because she was so close to him, so utterly under his protection. His eyes dwelt long on the sleeping girl while his mind was filled with a rapturous gratitude.

Her life, her slumber, the lines of her relaxed and unconscious form, each of which seemed a sort of spiritual barrier against the chaos of the world, filled him with a sense of limitless bliss and poured new strength into his heart.

She had been asleep for hours when she was awakened by the drums of a military patrol marching through the street. Nadinsky was pulling himself up to a sitting posture when he saw that her eyes were full of dull astonishment. They seemed to be trying to glow serenely, and then to be covered by a veil of shame. Lukardis uttered a little cry, and sprang up. Her face was suffused with blood. She pressed her hands to her breast and looked mutely ahead; and although Nadinsky spoke to her, she continued to appear embarrassed. He made an effort to speak casually, inquiring about the weather and the hour. She answered absentmindedly, her face revealing alternately shyness and fright, and gratitude and secret questioning. For the last time she washed and bound Nadinsky's wound, maintaining, meanwhile, her composure with difficulty. The world outside seemed to her like the open jaws of a savage beast. It was a quarter to six. They had to make themselves ready. Nadinsky was growing more and more calm; he was very pale, when, having dressed, he went into the other room where Lukardis stood. They sat opposite each other at the table. Lukardis was wearing her hat and fur coat; her handbag lay at her feet. Thus they waited in silence and with averted eyes for the time of their deliverance.

The clatter of wheels sounded finally in the street, and in a moment there was a knock on their door. The waiter came in wearing not his livery but a greasy bath-

robe. His hair hung in oily strands over his forehead and his face was sullen and evil. He presented the bill, which Nadinsky paid, including at the same time the coachman's fee. They went downstairs. Two pails filled with sweepings stood at the foot of the stairs, and in the entrance lay a black dog. The dog followed them, sniffing, to the carriage. Not a soul was to be seen in the streets as they drove the long way to the station.

In one of the waiting-rooms stood Anastasia Karlovna, beside a pillar. She greeted them and asked about Nadinsky's condition. Then she handed him a passport and a filled traveling bag, they hurried out to the platform, and Nadinsky took his place in the train. After a moment he came back, walked over to Lukardis, and stretched forth his hand. An unaccountable lack of muscular response prevented Lukardis's lifting her head and turning her face towards him. He took both her hands in his, and the four hands lay together like the links of a chain. So they remained for a moment and seemed to themselves figures in a dream. Anastasia Karlovna gestured warningly. With a dragging step, Nadinsky turned back to the car and climbed in, placing himself at the window where, in the black frame and the gray of the fog, his face was a chalk-white blot. The whistle blew, and the train rolled slowly out of the station.

When Lukardis reached home she found her mother dissolved in tears. The poor woman had not dared tell her husband of Lukardis's letter, and had been at great pains to keep her disappearance from his knowledge. A strange argument ensued between daughter and mother, a scene in which the deaf and dumb mother

gesticulated in her most excited and imploring manner while the girl merely shook her head and told nothing. Bit by bit the general's wife grew uneasy about Lukardis, and this uneasiness grew into dismay when the girl refused to see her fiancé, who had turned up for a few days in Moscow. Even her father's anger could not move her. She spoke no word, but looked calmly at the ground. The engagement was broken; and even more deliberately than before, Lukardis persisted in avoiding other people—friends, strangers, parents, sisters. She retired deep within herself, became a different person. The doctors having counseled travel, her mother took her first to Paris and then by the sea in Brittany. One night the general's wife came upon her daughter unexpectedly as she lay out on the flagstone terrace of her room. Hands folded behind her head, the girl was gazing with wide-open indescribably brilliant eyes, upward at the starry heavens. In her face was an expression of infinite loneliness.

Nadinsky had vanished. Several people insisted that he was living on a farm in western Canada, but Lukardis never heard his name spoken, nor heard he ever hers.

ERASMUS

The liaison between Erasmus Ungnad and Countess Marietta Giese had been going on for more than twelve years, and Georg Ulrich Castellani's malicious quip, that it would soon be time to range them in the gallery of famous lovers, was at least an indication of the degree of amazement felt by some of Erasmus's friends and the displeasure with which certain others viewed this relationship. The disapproval of his friends was as futile as that of his family, while considerations of career were as lightly dismissed as those of personal convenience. The affair was enigmatic, inexplicable: Erasmus was after all a Toggenburg; perseverance was certainly not one of his virtues. As for Marietta, she was on the other hand a Kæthchen, a woman of the world, a prudent person.

From time to time would come a break in their relations. To both it seemed each time definitive. By letter or by word of mouth, they would engage in a friendly discussion, each agreeing for the sake of the other's need or wish that a separation was best, and that it would be to their mutual advantage if the parting were marked by harmony and cordiality. They would release one another expressly from every form of obligation. And two months later, naturally, the union would be resumed. Erasmus's sister Francine could account for this in no sadder fashion than by referring to Marietta's diabolical nature. Three hundred years earlier she would have denounced Marietta bitterly as a witch.

Following Erasmus's return from Japan in 1912, the detachment seemed permanent. In Tokio, he had filled a very enviable post of confidence. His chief, the Foreign Minister, who was at the time a shining light in the diplomatic world and whom (as well as his Sovereign) Erasmus had helped perhaps for the very last time to a triumph over the European Powers, thought very highly of him, and was, moreover, well disposed towards the noble House of Ungnad. This powerful influence opened before him the most brilliant prospect. He was soon to be appointed to a prominent post in the embassy at London, and he might look forward, in the not too distant future, to ministerial rank.

Francine swooned with hope, and employed all her resources to bring about an advantageous marriage. The moment had never been so propitious. Two projects stood out conspicuously. The first concerned a young Baroness Spielberg who, through her American mother, was the heiress to millions. In the other was engaged the Countess Sebastiane, the second eldest daughter of the Rienburg-Rhedas. She was twenty-two years old, pretty, and charming. Francine knew that Erasmus had been in love with her during his secretaryship under Count Rienburg-Rheda in Rome. The Rienburg-Rhedas belonged to the most opulent nobility of the land. Through inheritance and through family alliances, they were the possessors of vast, long-held property in land and houses, castles, forests, and waterways, many of which they held, like sovereign dynasties, by virtue of century-old traditions.

Both projects came to naught. Erasmus's part in these abortive attempts remained undiscovered. In the first case, he was unable to make up his mind; in

the second, he never declared himself, so that the family remained unaffected and nobody was exposed to gossip. He had turned little Hortense Spielberg's head and kept her in suspense, first exciting her anticipation and then disillusioning her until the moment when, in a state of hysteria and overexcitation, she declared that she wanted never to see him again. As for the Rienburg-Rhedas, he had gone down to spend a week on their South Moravian estate. On the third day of his visit he had a stroke or seizure. Such misfortunes and casualties had always transported him into a ludicrous state of panic, and he left without touching upon the purpose of his visit. The end of this story was, immediately thereafter, a reconciliation with Marietta.

Francine was desperate. She argued with him somewhat as follows: There was reason to suppose that the Minister would withdraw his support. Erasmus's career had often been jeopardized by this woman. Francine reminded him of the day when Marietta had turned up suddenly in Petersburg and caused him great vexation; and of her appearance in Berlin the following winter during the conference of the crowned heads. She recalled to his mind the advice, written three years before by his perspicacious aunt Teresa Klingenberg: that a man in political life must take care at all cost to live in such wise that his conduct would not give rise to slanderous gossip; that his private life must either be so closely veiled as to be inscrutable to public curiosity, or it must be clearly unequivocal. Aside from these two there was no choice. Nothing was so calculated to sway public opinion against a diplomatist as an open love-affair.

Francine read him the passage from the letter, which

she had preserved. She exhausted herself in hour-long eloquence. She quoted the judgments, prophecies, opinions of his closest friends about himself and more particularly about Marietta. Even the insignificant Ferry Sponeck had his word. Her emotion arose out of her love for him and her anxiety for his welfare. He was the last of their line. She felt herself responsible for him. His personal fortune was small. In recent years she had tried, by speculation, to enhance it; through good advice and exceptional skill she had succeeded. But even if she had won millions, what would have been the use? The bliss she desired for him was a higher thing than riches. Her powerful rancor against Marietta lent emphasis and point to the arguments with which she hectored Erasmus. She was not ordinarily endowed with much insight into human nature, but, fired by her hatred, she sketched a portrait of Marietta which, for all its distortion, still retained a semblance of truth and more than a hint of frightfulness. Marietta, she said, was greedily avid of honors; vain; soulless; she possessed only a bookish culture; her endeavor to play the great lady was doubly provoking in her equivocal situation; her flaunted pretense of freedom was accompanied by the reputation of an adventuress; she was profoundly selfish, and, like all selfish women, dangerously materialistic; her first youth was gone and her second was rapidly passing; she was divorced from a husband who had sacrified everything for her and pampered her, and was made unhappy and isolated by her, a spiritually and physically stunted man.

Francine was dauntless. She was prepared for a damaging parallel, for she was herself in an equivocal

situation. Her own womanly adventures had been encountered in other paths than the conventional and the approved, during her unguarded years. It was only by virtue of great tenacity and intelligence that she had won her ground and maintained her position in society. A gloomy fate, that this antagonism, which she herself did not entirely understand, should flourish in her mind.

Erasmus forbore to answer. In everything that concerned himself, he agreed with her; about Marietta, he remained silent. He appreciated Francine's affection; her violence annoyed him. She demanded promises; he refused to give them. He begged for time to think the matter over. The time for reflection slipped by, and the upshot of Francine's exertions was that Erasmus went down to stay at Marietta's country place at Eichfurth. Thereupon, Francine went to the Foreign Minister. She opened her mind to him unreservedly, and saw from the fashion in which he listened to her how fond he was of Erasmus. The solution,—to get Erasmus away,—was as clearly essential to him as to her. The London post was not yet in need of filling; there was a possibility that Erasmus might be sent out to India. The British Government and the Viceroy had recently invited the participation of the Powers in a Durbar. Twenty-four hours later, Erasmus's appointment on this mission was confirmed. A telegram called him back from Eichfurth, and ten days later his ship steamed out of the harbor of Trieste. Once more Francine believed him saved. Each month that went by was something of a gain. Erasmus was thirty-three; Marietta Giese thirty-five. The magical spell could not last much longer. What reason had found

impossible, time would accomplish. Even though it might cost further battles, Francine was at rest. Meanwhile, her stubborn effort had been rewarded in that from Calcutta Erasmus, when his task was ended, would be ordered direct to London.

From the time of his twenty-first year, Count Erasmus Ungnad had served in the diplomatic career. His path had been the customary and foreordained one: Rome, Petersburg, Stockholm, Washington, Tokio, and then London. He had seen and heard much; for certain people, he seemed to have lived a rich life. He knew the inner workings of the international political machinery. He had learned how the sheeplike masses were led. His seat at the most brilliant events was always in a proscenium box. He fulfilled his representational duties with adequate merit. Responsibility was his as of right; his bearing betrayed a consciousness of his burden. The breeding of generations had made of him an example to set before the hesitant. His demeanor revealed that he was born to the part he played. It came to this: one Did and one Was, merely as a matter of course. To think in this connection about oneself were the merest pretentiousness, something permitted only in an idle moment. As concerned trustworthiness, he was as high-principled as an automaton, as unrevealing as a safety-vault. Wherever he went he was the man of confidential service, of mediation, of appeasement. It never occurred to anybody to speak of his intelligence or his genius; but his chivalry and loyalty were widely eulogized.

He had been borne along on the tide of time, people, and events. His path had not been marked by obstruc-

tions. Occasionally a wave of disaffection or discouragement was washed over his external demeanor and professional reserve. But the stream rushed forward in a broad and pleasant course. His future and his past displayed the same prospect of a delightful path, an unobstructed view, an abundance of temptations, a multitude of servitors, an accessible world. During his hours of reverie there would flare up in his ordinarily indolent consciousness a sense of his hereditary and securely acquired earthly goods: a Moroccan sky, red deepening into blue; a gorgeous pageant, arranged by exotic princes; ceremonious receptions; brilliantly lighted halls; military parades; women yearning to be loved; strange landscapes.

He had brought back from Japan a diary which had been privately printed in a limited edition for distribution among his friends. They had considered it at the time the finest flower of aristocratic comprehension of life and observation, and indeed it comprised many delicate things. The way in which reality and the present moment were seized was original and naïve, indeed often a little ingenuous, as a horn-book is ingenuous. In this blending of moderation, exaggeration, and innocent philosophy, Ungnad revealed himself a somewhat lovable person. Journeys were described, at sea and on river, at night in lamp-hung boats; there were pages about native theaters, wanderings, temples and gardens. But scarcely one human face, scarcely a breath of vicissitude. Dangling flowers, ever more flowers, the names of flowers, the colors of flowers, the odors of flowers; an undeviated sensuousness allowed one to divine the sensuous limitations of his nature, as well as how much indolence went into his resignation

and how far his fastidiousness might be explained by concern with form.

The fourteen months in London which preceded the war carried to their extreme all the allurements of his world. They formed an unbroken chain of festivities. The wealth and sumptuousness of Europe, even of the globe, had condensed into a single radiance, and he stood in its midst at the glittering hub, dispensing and being showered with grace. The arts of the nations were united in rendering homage to the ruling classes. Every day that passed was replete with luxury. The fire of high spirits ran in all veins, and the most ordinary of men were nourished on the extraordinary. Carried up to illuminated heights, the jejune saw about them only cloudless horizons. And when the thunderclap broke, this world broke asunder in breathless consternation, while over the rosy picture fell a pall of black crêpe as if forever to hide it.

What followed was the curt execution of official duties in remote districts, in conquered provinces amid the rattling of sabers. It was difficult to keep one's head. From both sides arose the paralyzing tumult of army camps. Hatred defiled men, like greasy dirt clinging in their pores. The garlands once torn away, there were now only naked bodies to stare one in the face. The initial intoxication soured into shame. Strong foundations shook, and men were enervated by the almost imperceptible narrowing and fretting of their daily existence. And thus the storm continued to rage, whirling the leaves from the tree of life, splitting its branches, and hollowing out its roots. Work bore no fruit; the General was lord over all. One was a pawn in a chess game, without ever knowing how the

game stood. Distress and anguish appeared in every country, and particularly in one's own. One tried to convince oneself of the need for humility, one looked for guidance towards the past—and one's bewilderment grew. Willingly, each man threw in his lot with the rest, and hoped, feared, waited, year after year—waited for the worst, which was always worse than what his lowest depth of despondency had been able to envisage.

In August of 1918, Ungnad was sent out, with a Prussian, Colonel Grimm, to Armenia, to report on the conditions there which gave rise to enemy propaganda. Turkish officers and officials accompanied them for the purpose of hushing up whatever might turn out to need stifling. In many places, artificial spectacles, a series of blinds, were prepared for their benefit; finally, however, the true horror was revealed to them. They were already on their way back when a sense of foreboding came over Erasmus. From the ship he wrote to Francine afterward: "We were magnificently received by the Patriarch at Echtmiadzin. Never have I seen such beautiful tapestries or such gorgeous church vessels. The Patriarch was clothed in gold and purple, and surrounded by a retinue whose splendid robes dazzled the eye. From the arched windows of the immense hall we could see the snow-covered peaks of the Taurus, dominated by the mighty Mt. Ararat. Ararat! The very name made me shudder. Down in the courtyard stood a crowd of more than a thousand people, and out of that crowd came a curious whining sound. We thought at first that they had come to attend the service which was about to be held, but the Patriarch, pointing to the crowd and addressing

Grimm and me, said: 'They are hungry. They are begging for bread. Tell your Emperor that they are hungry.' The Turks stood behind us in embarrassment. Meanwhile, the whining went on, and I continued to gaze at Ararat. The next day we set out for the sea through stifling valleys, past ruins, and across battlefields. Deserts and vineyards lying side by side. Here and there a human being, squatting in rags before the entrance to a rocky cavern. We reached the coast where lay the blue ocean, but the air was poisoned by the stench of innumerable corpses floating nude and clothed on the water. Many of them—men, women, and children—had been so mutilated as to be unrecognizable. Turkish troops had once again massacred the Armenians and driven these defenseless hordes into the sea. I said to myself: this magnificent scenery, and man, the beast, disfigures it. The beauty of this earth and sky are a lie."

In the course of this long mission, Erasmus had become rather intimate with Colonel Grimm, whom he found to be a silent, sensible man, far easier to get on with than most Prussians. As they were parting at the railway station in Budapest, they saw a German private standing a few paces away. Broken and wretched, the fellow stared the Colonel impudently in the face and made no move to salute. The Colonel looked at him and grew red. He seemed about to challenge the man but changed his mind, and, lowering his eyes and exerting all his self-control, he began to speak idly to Erasmus. On his way home alone, Erasmus could not get this scene out of his mind.

There was a threat in the air. Something uncanny was happening, and there seemed no defense against it.

A man like Erasmus had been standing on a certain height, unassailable, unattainable. Tradition, charters, had been his age-old source of protection. These safeguards had hitherto withstood the test. They had drawn a spacious circle about him, and the common people stood outside that circle. Indeed, even the respectful attentiveness of the people had occasionally been a nuisance. Men, time, and things were mere hirelings at his unconditioned disposal. The things had bent flatteringly towards the hand which was to make its choice among them, and the law, sanctified through many mute centuries, had prescribed the standard of choice.

Of a sudden all this that had been accepted was now contested. Privileges which had reigned in the finest domains of life, among the choicest forms, among all things choice of whatever nature, were now attacked. And these privileges were undeniable, since they were prescribed by blood; even to protest in the matter was beneath a man's dignity. Yet, admitting the fact, it was still difficult to grasp the meaning of this threat. It was so malicious, so provokingly illogical, and it had such an air of prowling in corners, like a cowardly phantom. Let us sit up erect, prepared for what is to come.

Francine was all enthusiasm over a new project of marriage. It had again to do with a Rienburg-Rheda, with Pauline, the third daughter, who was now twenty years old and quite grown up. Of the four sisters the eldest, Polyxene—called Lix—had married the Baron von Lerchenfeld-Quadt while still very young. For reasons unknown, she had been separated from her hus-

band and had been living with her mother for some years past. The story went that her husband had come home drunk, accompanied by two chorus girls, and that Lix had simply walked out of the house. Another daughter, Sebastiane, had married a Count Dettingen one year after her father's death, and had two children. Dettingen, a captain of hussars, was killed in the battle of Luck. There were two unmarried girls, Pauline, and Aglaia, who was only seventeen.

Francine had laid her plans cautiously and in minute detail. Emissaries had been sent to feel out the situation with care. Noncommittal proposals had been made; letters, their tactics guided by the masterpieces of diplomacy of another age, had been written. Bit by bit the indefinite became transformed into the tangible. Before Erasmus's return from Constantinople, Francine was already in possession of an invitation to him from the Countess Rienburg. She grew more and more uneasy while awaiting his answer. Fateful events were imminent and a black pall hung in the political sky.

On the very morning that brought his telegram, she learned that Marietta had come up to town from Eichfurth. This could only mean that she, too, had news from him and was also awaiting his coming. Francine did not stop for mature reflection but wrote an impulsive letter in which she explained to Marietta that Erasmus's future was at stake; that he had already wasted his strength and his best years in an attempt to cast off her chains; that he was slowly approaching the age at which a man ceased to interest women; that he was now about to make a brilliant match; and that the family, determined to remove every obstacle from

the path of this match, appealed to her judgment and strength of character to show her the way out of this difficulty for herself.

It was fortunate that before sending off this letter she read it to her cousin, Nora Klingenberg, who advised strongly against this step. "Is the old game to begin over again?" asked Francine heatedly: "break, reconciliation, separation, remorse, promise never to see each other again, and then the sentimental embrace of reconciliation. No. I can't stand it any longer. It has been going on this way for years, until we have become the laughing-stock of the whole world." Nora pointed out that her violence could only make matters worse, particularly as concerned Erasmus's hesitation and vacillation. The more seductive the bait, the more difficult it was for him to decide to snap at it; the more one strove to persuade him, the more stubbornly he resisted. She should handle the affair more craftily, more patiently, especially as regards Marietta. Nora offered to go to Marietta Giese and talk to her as one woman to another. Some sort of understanding might result from that. Francine embraced her and called her an angel. "Don't let yourself be impressed by her," she warned. "Don't forget how, at the Castellani reception last winter, she drowned out your remark in the discussion whether the Lehndorffs or the Klingenbergs were the older family. I give you my word that her grandfather, Johann Lehndorff, used to lend money at interest, even though he was the governor of a province. And it must have been a high rate of interest, too. Georg Ulrich says it was never under twelve per cent."

As a matter of fact, Baroness Nora returned from

her call rather depressed. Marietta, she said, had been cool, sarcastic, suave, and evasive, and had succeeded throughout in changing the subject of conversation. Once when she came to the point, Marietta had smiled curiously—and they had spent a half hour in conversation about really nothing at all. She had a way with people; nothing could prevail against her. You were still on one subject while she had already canvassed a dozen. Each of her sentences had ten loopholes. For the rest, she was as pretty as ever, as fascinating and as lovely. The past fifteen years had passed miraculously without leaving their trace on her.

Francine exploded with anger. She paced the room and shouted like a charwoman. She sneered, threatened, shoved furniture out of her path, swore that she would utterly destroy that dangerous fraud! She even shed tears, while the frightened Baroness Nora tried in vain to pacify her.

Count Ferdinand Sponeck was one of Erasmus's oldest friends. He was a total failure, both as concerned his career and his personal development. Notwithstanding that many wires had been pulled in his favor, he had been stuck away in one of those government offices that harbor the inept members of the highest aristocracy. No help was of any avail. He could not even spell correctly. Erasmus had never troubled to decide whether he was actually as stupid as he was reputed. He enjoyed his company chiefly because of Sponeck's absolute discretion.

As a general thing, he found it hard to get on with men. They seemed to him insolent, for they always tried to learn his intimate thoughts, without realizing

that this was offensive to him. Most men had no notion of man's sensitiveness in general. Ferry Sponeck, on the other hand, never laid one under obligation to him and was never insistent. There were times when he babbled and retailed bits of gossip; and in such moments Erasmus felt a certain confidential atmosphere hovering over them; he had a desire to make revelations of his own, even to confess certain things. It was easy to grow communicative with Ferry, particularly when he opened wide his eyes with childlike amazement, shook his head pityingly at the wrong moment, and even interjected a foolish comment on occasion. At such moments one was alone with oneself and at the same time not alone. One chatted on, relieved momentarily of any depression, and the past seemed even to be marked by a semblance of form, of order. And with Ferry one had no need to answer curious questions tactfully, or bother about the wise observations and the disquieting splitting of hairs that made the company of intelligent people so irritating.

On the day following his return Erasmus went to see Ferry Sponeck, who lived in a small old *hôtel particulier* in a small old street. He strolled over, slowly and absent-mindedly, filled with a sense of impending disaster. Many years before, in Sicily, he had felt the same uninterrupted strain on his nerves. It was on the eve of the great earthquake. He remembered that when he had got back to his hotel he had had a sudden attack of hysteria.

His agitation increased when he found himself seated by the lamp in Ferry's sitting-room. Ferry was preparing coffee in a copper percolator. From time to

time he would fill his cheeks with air, like Boreas in the old prints, and blow up the kerosene flame.

"Everything in the department is topsy-turvy," said Erasmus. "They spend most of their time carrying cases of documents up to the storerooms while important telegrams go unanswered."

Ferry sighed.

Erasmus stared straight ahead of him, brooding. "I cannot," he went on in his slow, veiled tone, "like most of us, shut my eyes to the fact that we have managed things with deplorable frivolity. We had no leaders; nobody was at the head of things. Many of us saw disaster coming and made light of it. We have been guilty of stupidity and blindness. But there must be no open rebellion. Once that begins, the world will simply go under. Rebellion is Satan's work. It means the rejection and crucifixion of Christ. I read somewhere once that He was crucified every two thousand years. The time will soon be up."

Ferry Sponeck nodded. There was a brown foam on the coffee under the glass lid. Thoughtfully he removed the stopper. The boiling fluid ran black into the gold cup.

Erasmus spoke again: "The grumbling mob grows daily greater. These people don't yet dare look one in the face, but they have drawn out their knives behind our back. They carry their knives unsheathed in their pockets. They'll be upon us before we know it. I wonder if your ears also are filled with an unceasing sound of breaking glass? I hear it, even in my sleep. And then I hear voices shouting in the distance."

"You think too much, Mumu," Ferry Sponeck scolded him affectionately. He called him by this

childhood diminutive on rare occasions. "You are not a scholar, you know, to be spending all your time in thought. We can't change anything; we have to let things come as they will."

Erasmus went on haltingly: "I once sailed from Corfu to Athens in an old sailing vessel. At night the rats would come out and run across my blankets. It was horrible. The filthy tub went down on her next voyage." His voice sank and he rubbed his fingers nervously together. "Of course I was not frightened, but you must admit that rats are the most disgusting things in the world. They are bold in the dark. They have confidence in their sharp teeth. They are protected, naturally, by their numbers, by the squalor, the horror." He paused, and his smile was both sickly and disdainful. "We don't dare show our intimidation or our weakness. We have the protection of our religion, and the rats know nothing about that, to be sure; and we have what people call our sense of honor. Honor: a diamond bullet. The Ungnad arms bear a beautiful motto—*fort et modeste.* The time is nigh when that won't mean much, when the coat of arms will be broken into bits. They may break it, if they like, but they cannot soil it. Nobody on earth can shake my conviction that all legitimacy exists by the grace of God."

Ferry nodded again. Erasmus stood up languidly on his long legs and repeated with a kind of obstinacy: "By that I stand or fall: all legitimacy exists by the grace of God."

Francine transmitted Countess Rienburg-Rheda's invitation, and to her joy, Erasmus declared his readiness to accept it. He knew what was up; he knew that

Francines lived for only one thing; but this time he did not, as so often before, decline with a shake of the head and a stubborn smile. He was miserable in town, and longed for the silence of the country. "Is everything over between you and Marietta?" asked Francine in a tone that was half menace and half fear. "Everything was over long ago," he answered. Francine was enchanted. "Then you don't see one another any more." He replied in a cool, reluctant voice: "Oh, yes. We still see one another. But seldom, very seldom. I saw her last in June." Whereupon Francine went into details about Pauline's character and the desirability of a marriage between her and Erasmus. He listened in silence and then said: "You may be right, Francine. Generally you are right." Francine hastened to telegraph to the Countess the date of Erasmus's arrival.

He had agreed out of pure amiability. Later, however, a variety of objections occurred to him, each of which he pondered conscientiously. There would be people he had never met, and he imagined them to be most objectionable—gossiping people, obtrusive people. Obligations would be incurred. He would wound somebody's feelings and have the trouble of setting things right. Pressure would be exerted. The house would be noisy: somebody was sure to be slamming doors or trap shooting at five in the morning, or training a dog to the accompaniment of endless chatter. He would have to buy equipment, pack trunks, let people know where he was. A mountain of objections arose, and he put off his visit. Francine stormed, and he tried to explain. They needed him in the department, he said. They did not need him there at all, she retorted. As things stood, he was better off away from

the department. Wearying of argument, he gave in, begging only one week's respite. She haggled with him, and insisted that he go down on Sunday. He agreed. On Saturday he had a card from Marietta, asking him to tea on the following Tuesday. He was frightened. This was most unexpected. Secretly, he had foreseen such a contingency, and now that it had happened, he was upset. He told Francine that an important conference at the department prevented his leaving before Wednesday. She was speechless with indignation, but she had to content herself with his promise of no further postponement.

A group of noblemen stood at a corner window of the club. Erasmus was at the back, his height permitting him to look over the heads of the others.

An endless number of workmen from the factory districts flocked by, a broad, black, sticky stream of silent men. They had come to hear the proclamation of the Republic. The street was filled with them. From the foggy distance, that seemed to stretch back into infinity, this human stream wound forward, taking on gradually the shape of bodies and faces, accreted by rivulets from the by-streets; they rolled past the club, silent and threatening, with set faces, eyes gazing straight ahead, in irresistible lock-step, moving through the gate at the head of the street into the great square that swallowed up this closely packed mass of men. Out of the endless distance this monstrous stream crawled and rolled, not divided into calculable units but a single cohesive element, a blend of a single visible will, tremendously real, moved by an immense and

threatening power, pouring into the great throat of the gate that gulped them greedily down.

The noblemen stood transfixed. Dull bewilderment choked their voices. One of them said aloud to himself: "This is the end."

Evening fell and Erasmus accompanied Ferry Sponeck to his home. They avoided all discussion of this scene, smothered it within themselves. It had come very close to them, and for that there was no help; but at least they could try to brush it aside, bury it.

They ate in silence, listening for noises from the street. But this old street of old palaces was a quiet street. It was still living in the past, dreaming quietly beneath a silken veil.

Ferry said something about going down to the Rienburg-Rhedas for a fortnight. The Countess had urged him several times to come. As a matter of fact, he was a cousin of the Dettingens and thus related to Sebastiane. Erasmus nodded in apparent approval of his decision. He was himself not particularly glad to be going down, he said; but Francine gave him no peace, and he was forced to yield to her whim. It was hard to oppose Francine, not merely because of her violence —there was violence everywhere—but also because one had to be considerate of her feelings.

He paused, waiting to learn if Ferry had grasped what he meant. Ferry's face seemed to say: I understand, if you want me to. At the same time, I am dense, if that is what you want. Ferry was delicacy itself, as Erasmus knew and appreciated. He understood, without impertinence, without the premature judgment on which so many people prided themselves. Erasmus was trying to analyze the confusion and dis-

appointment of Francine's life. He had never sought to put it into words. To do so meant an audience, a person who would understand and at the same time not understand, who would remain neutral, exactly as Ferry had just shown himself neutral. He was satisfied with Ferry's expression and went on:

Francine had been cheated of her youth. She was eighteen when the Italian tenor came along and the irreparable happened. Her seducer was forty-six, married, and the father of six children. And Francine had taken upon herself all the consequences. Not only had she adjusted herself to her difficult situation and remained constant to the man who had ruined her life, but in the midst of the disappointment, the humiliation, the thousand difficulties, she had displayed a character of steel. She had fought heroically, had managed to reassume her place in society, and had, with all this, been an effective and energetic friend to him, to her younger brother. One was forced to admire her. If one didn't, it showed merely that one had no conception of courage and dignity.

Ferry evidently got the idea, for he gazed confidingly at Erasmus. After a while Erasmus went on: "I have often wondered why, with all Francine's pride and sense of family, she had to suffer this fate. I have thought about it a good deal, and it seems to me that the source of her disaster is something common to every Ungnad. In the life of every Ungnad there is a moment, a flash, when sensuality takes matters out of our hands and decides for us. Usually, it begins with some trifle or other, something scarcely to be explained. For instance, one of us crosses a bridge and sees a woman on a balcony. He sees her throat, or her leg—and there

you are. Or, something equally stupid occurs. But what happens in this brief flash influences and penetrates his whole life, like a perfume that hangs forever irremovably in a room. It is as if a single drop of some chemical lent an inexpungeable taste to a well of water. We Ungnads are helpless in the presence of this odor, this taste. It is something in us that is ineradicable."

Ferry gazed at him blankly. This was far beyond his comprehension. "Well, well," he murmured; "of course; too bad, old fellow. Poor chap. Very bad indeed."

There was one profound and well-guarded secret in Countess Marietta Giese's life. This secret was at once a source of strength and of pain; it brought her happiness, but it brought her also cruel doubts, which, fortunately, she was able to master. It is often so: a secret burden hidden from the world may be a treasure, and a hidden treasure may be a thing of pain.

Marietta had a child by Erasmus, and Erasmus was unaware of it. The boy had come during the year of Erasmus's stay in Japan. He had known nothing of her confinement; the only person in the secret was her friend Helene von Gravenreuth. The little boy, called Wolf, was born in a Dresden nursing home, and was living in good hands at Gravenreuth Castle.

He was not the child of chance, but of volition. Marietta had been well aware of the burden she was assuming when she bore him. Assuredly, the world would be against her, and the child's fate would be uncertain. Such offspring are tainted from the beginning. Erasmus was not the type of man who is bound

more closely to the beloved by the fact of a child. One of the elements in their relationship had always been his superstitious fear that there might be a child. She might have been flattered by this fear; instead, something in the depths of her soul took it as an insult. The woman in her had had a tardy awakening. She felt the need for herself and for him, and against society, of something that was uniquely his. A bond, a confirmation, was essential. It mattered little that he might learn of it. Perhaps he would never know. There was little sentimentality or tenderness about either of them. The child was of service to her; it fortified her. Besides, it was more than a bond and a confirmation; it was also a beautiful and living image. She was contemptuous of fathers, had no faith in the notion of paternal emotion. As for Erasmus, to present him with a child begotten out of wedlock would revive all his patriarchal prejudices and in all likelihood awaken in him a good many doubts about its mother. There were reasons enough for secrecy.

She had fought, too, for freedom and love; how much she had fought, he was never to know. She had torn away chains that had been mortifying her flesh. So far as he might be aware, she had merely taken out of her hair a fading wreath. Things that he despised were objects of reverence for her; things that depressed him had for her a sacred significance. Throughout their life he had hesitated, held back, warned, misunderstood her, in those moments when she felt that one had to go forward. What ruse and cunning had been necessary! How much effort and affection she had wasted! What shrewdness had to be employed to lead him on while deluding him into the belief that he was

taking the lead! And their life! Parting; uncertainty; return; suspense; each at the other end of the world; emptiness; together again; his hypochondria. A blaze of passion, a higher flare, and then the blaze would die down. Can one speak of passion where there is so much distrust that a person is rendered defenseless? where there is such shadowy, phantomlike disappearance? It was Marietta who kindled the spark, warmed Erasmus with look and breath, impressed her image upon him, created the hour, the caress, the binding oath. Everything depended on his remembering that in finding her he found himself; and Marietta let herself be found, not too easily, and yet not with too much difficulty. He was always on the point of throwing off this unsanctified yoke, of disavowing the past. She, beneath a superficial air of tranquillity, was forever keeping the scales in balance, patient, intent, cheerful, beautiful; quarreling with the world in which she moved, inwardly mastering the social tyranny to which her instincts were still subject, and living thus in a continuous state of suspense on the border line between society and life, between the things that are done and the things that are not done.

For a long time she was unable to decide whether to see him again or not. At their last meeting they had renounced each other more gravely than ever before. She had seen it as a declaration of her disinterestedness. Their separation was necessary to his peace of mind and in order that he might be free to decide about the plans which others were making for him. Nothing was left to her but to wait. The passing years had gradually undermined her confidence in her own power, which had hitherto been equal to any situation. Her

mirror was a constant reminder of these years. Her mirror did not deceive her, nor could it be deceived.

She bade the servants turn on the lights earlier than usual. Since she had been indisposed all day, she lay down to await the passage of the hours. She had always hated November. It was in November, she was sure, that she would die. The old servant, with the face of a Kalmuck, passed quietly to and fro, setting the tea table. The precious china clinked melodiously. Marietta wore a rose-colored tea gown with broad Valenciennes lace at the sleeves. The color of the gown set off the glow of her skin and the ruddy gold of her heavy hair.

A bell rang and Erasmus appeared. As he came almost noiselessly forward, Marietta greeted him with a tender, unaffected smile, put forth her hand to be kissed, and asked his forgiveness for receiving him thus on her couch. They were silent for a moment, and then Erasmus said something apologetically about not having come before of his own accord. She professed surprise and cut short his pitiful opening. Meanwhile, the Kalmuck had brought in the tea, which provided a moment's diversion. Marietta took the lead in their conversation, feeling instinctively that she ought to talk a great deal. She told him of the amusing things that had happened at Eichfurth, described a dinner party, a walk at night through the agitated town, a meeting with one of the deposed cabinet ministers, the dismissal of an impudent maid, her impressions of Barbusse's *l'Enfer*. She spoke lightly and pointedly, giving full rein to the play of her voice, for of a sudden she recognized that her voice still possessed its sensuous magic.

Erasmus felt in the beginning as if he had never heard that voice before. After a time, he recognized its tones, its intervals, interjections, rapidity, animation. He was too clumsy to keep pace with her. There was nothing new in this; he had always hung a little behind, pondering, seeking to grasp her meaning. Often she had stopped, good-humoredly, and waited for his mind to come abreast of her words. But there had been times also when she had not waited, when his confusion and gallant zeal had delighted her. She was happy now in the thought that he was completely unaware of what she had in mind, that she could bewilder him, send him running in circles and disquiet him by her flying words. Her lips quivered occasionally with suppressed petulance, but behind the petulance was a melancholy that lent charm and variety to her expression.

Suddenly, without a preliminary hint, she said: "It isn't a bad idea of Francine's to send you off sparking at the Rienburg-Rhedas'. I agree with her entirely. You didn't go far enough with Sebastiane six years ago to compromise yourself or ruin any future prospects. That project, like all the others that have been advanced for your marriage, went awry, and it was a good thing, for Sebastiane was not your type. But this little Pauline may be the person you ought to marry."

Erasmus stared straight ahead in embarrassment while she looked towards him with a smile and went on: "I know the family very well. Lix adored me for a time and followed me about like a shadow. I helped her in a somewhat dangerous correspondence that she once undertook. When her marriage to Lerchenfeld turned out unhappily, she became a theosophist, which

I thought a poor sort of consolation for a rather *chic* young woman. I say, Pauline may do very well, and besides there is still Aglaia, who might—you never can tell—be even more suitable. I said a word about it to Georg Ulrich Castellani, just to draw him out, for he is as clever as can be and has spent a good deal of time with the Rienburgs. Between ourselves, he is going down at the same time. Pity that there is such a difference in age between Aglaia and you. Twenty-two years; it's almost indecent! Besides, you might have trouble with her; she's a good deal of a tomboy. Or perhaps you'd like that? Do you feel energetic enough to tame a stubborn girl? But I don't think she is meant for you. Pauline is quieter; a bit of a Mélusine. Would you like that? She is fond of asking riddles, but her riddles are easy to answer, though she thinks them unanswerable. And that's another thing to your advantage, for it will keep her busy. What you need is a woman who will worship you constantly. I don't mean adore you; that is too suave and too shallow. I mean really worship you, a woman lost in wonder before you. Not through stupidity, either, but through a gift of imagination. If you marry a woman without imagination you are likely to find that at the end of three weeks she will have bored you and herself to death. Or else she will grow pretentious, and that will get on your nerves frightfully. It is difficult to dig into your hidden thoughts; it takes spirit, and a good deal of patience. Don't do anything to create confusion. Don't fall in love with both girls at once. And don't annoy them by playing one off against the other, for you are sure to lose both if you do. Keep cool, but if you feel an honest affection, don't hide it. Don't

squeeze your heart too tightly and don't let your eyes shine greedily."

Erasmus displayed his splenetic smile as he answered hesitatingly: "Your interest is really touching and enchanting, Marietta. What a pity that there is so little cause for it. I do not deny that an alliance with the Rienburgs has its advantages, but as you yourself admit, I am scarcely suited to the married state. The utility and the advantage are clear to me, but if it is merely a question of saying yes or no, I answer that I think yes and no foolish words. Why do people insist that I give them a yes or a no? It is a bore to have to make a decision. I will not make a decision."

"You will not make a decision," Marietta repeated slowly with an almost imperceptible undertone of bitterness in her voice. "How well I know that. You want decisions to be made for you, and as comfortably as possible. You don't want to stir; you want to live in a world under glass, like wax flowers. But you cannot spend your life in a world that knows no yes or no. Has it ever occurred to you how fatal a thing is indecision, and how unfair it is to be always saying 'not yet'? You are neither more nor less suited to married life than any other selfish and pampered man of your age. People who think more of themselves than the world thinks of them are always a little ridiculous. What risk would you run? At the worst, you would make some woman unhappy. Has that thought really so much weight with you? Or, of course, you may find it entrancing to live in a deserted house, a passably interesting and curious bachelor, alternately invited out and overlooked, while you live with weak-minded cooks and footmen who wear your linen and steal your cigar-

ettes. What, after all, are you hesitating about?"

The perplexity that was patent in Erasmus's face lent it an expression of piteous distress. "I should never have expected you to become so zealous an advocate of my marriage" he said. "This is all new—"

Marietta looked at him with wide-open eyes. "Don't you see, my dear," she said slowly and affectionately, "that I, too, have to think about my future and my security. Surely, you don't think me so simple-minded as to be urging this upon you without selfish motives. When I was a child, we had a picture in the house that was called 'The Deserted Woman.' The woman was seated on a rocky coast, gazing yearningly out at sea. There were words like 'tearless' and 'sorrowful' somewhere below the picture. I never could look at that picture without losing my temper over that stupid goose. You don't expect me to cut such a tragic figure. 'Sorrowful' and 'tearless': no, thank you. I believe in finishing things."

"I don't understand," murmured Erasmus; "we have always agreed—"

"That will do, please," she interrupted him sharply, her head in the air and her eyes shining like dark opals.

"But what do you mean by your future and your security?"

"Simply that I want to get married myself."

Erasmus gasped. "Married? You? To whom, for God's sake!"

His eyebrows were raised in two bewildered angles. These circumflexes, combined with his appeal to God, drew a peal of laughter from Marietta, at which he started. He adored her laughter; it made a ripe fruit of her mouth and lent her the air of a girl of twenty. It

revived half-forgotten, half-vanished memories of charms and caresses, of unforgetable things, of the most intimate miracles of sex. His inner disquiet was something he could express only in external immobility. He looked at her as a man might look at a woman about whom he has heard bewitching things but whom he is now meeting for the first time.

The story she had to tell was a little romance, a trivial affair in whose very triviality resided its perfection and sense of security. Marietta was through with finesse. She had gone to Berne the previous summer, with her friend Helene von Gravenreuth, and there she had met a wealthy young Dutchman who was fond of luxury, full of high spirits, and extremely well bred. The Dutchman—whose name she preferred for the moment to conceal—had fallen desperately and determinedly in love with her. She had not precisely encouraged him, but neither had she sent him away. He turned up one day at Pontresina when she and Helene happened to have driven over there. They had made several excursions together, played bridge, and so on,—the usual things. Then Helene and she returned. He wrote to her and wrote to Helene. In each letter he declared himself more openly and more passionately, and now Helene had asked him to Gravenreuth and had asked Marietta as well. He was probably there now; she was going over from Eichfurth, two days hence. As Gravenreuth and Rienburg were within a couple of hours' walk, she concluded, it would be charming for them to confer daily about the progress of their respective engagements and plans,—that is, if, like good comrades, they felt so inclined.

"How curious," murmured Erasmus, and said nothing

further. Marietta, too, was silent. She sat drawing rings with the point of her slipper while Erasmus looked on. Meanwhile, she was gazing at the ceiling; her full, passionately arched lips were open, forming a glittering crevice. Suddenly she sprang up and began to walk about the room. She strolled to and fro, unhurried, as if responding to an inner rhythm, her body swaying against the serenely still background of the room. Now and then she would touch a vase or a bit of drapery without lifting her hand, languidly, almost in a gliding, accidental contact.

Erasmus knew her gait of old; he knew with what care she placed her foot, lightly and yet energetically, so that the legs might move freely and the vibration of the hips be almost imperceptible, while the upper part of her body participated in the movement only sufficiently for dignity and freedom. Her step was calculated and finished. She moved as if she took sensuous pleasure in walking, as if she were actually carrying herself. Each fluid line of her body contained the germ of a gesture familiar to him for many years, and as she moved thus about, touching her beautiful objects, he lived over again many hours of his life and many of his thoughts, both of wish and of fulfilment.

Shyly, he spoke: "Are you in love with him?"

"Pooh! Love!" she exclaimed. "It isn't a matter of love; it's a matter of something to hold on to, something permanent. I grow weary, occasionally, you know, and it is satisfying to rest beside some one. Even thinking about it is a kind of satisfaction. Not only you and I, but everybody is more or less driven into a corner at one time or another. Inhaling and exhaling: heavens!" She stood still and stared unseeingly at a

picture on the wall. "I know what I am letting myself in for," she went on in a sonorous voice whose depth betrayed blood and character. "When a person of my experience determines to marry again, there are no illusions. At eighteen, it's a jump into the dark. I made it, and didn't break my legs. All that I learned was that one wants a long spoon to sup with the devil. But adventure has its charm, and sweet day rises full of promise. We are credulous creatures. At this stage I shall be happy if the man to whom I entrust myself treats me with the consideration that is due a decently acquired disability."

Erasmus found this to say: "We have gone through much together in these many years, and I cannot conceive that this may be the end."

"It is strange," said Marietta, sitting down at the piano and putting back the lid, "that whatever you might say or do, you never grew either away from me or towards me, there was neither estrangement nor increased intimacy. You were always the person who came and went; never the one who remained behind. You never could look me in the eyes. You were always afraid of the glance that beckoned. Why was that?" She struck a few chords very softly and went on. "It is true that we have experienced much together, but not together in the way you think." She bent her head a little lower. "Often, during our happiest moments—and they were happy moments, I don't mean to be ungrateful—I used to say to myself: You have stolen him from himself and he resents the theft. Yes, I would say to myself, he is storing up resentment, grudges against you, and one of these days he will turn up with a long account for settlement. And that being so, why

not make an end of it all before he presents his account? Don't you think I am right?"

Erasmus rose and started towards her. She made a gesture of defense.

Twenty-four hours later, Erasmus was in a distant world, like a man ordered abroad to seek his fortune. The warmth with which he was welcomed depressed him, for he imagined that in it he could sense a program. He seemed even more shy than he really was, but that did not last long. He expanded with the small talk in the presence of the unaffectedly cheerful women with whom he had many common interests. The slight compulsion to sociability did not go beyond the easy formalities of polite intercourse. One's day was spent in the fulfilment of duties that were in no way burdensome. Evenings, everybody assembled in the charming dining-hall, decorated in the style of Maria Theresa, in the light of the candles that burned softly in six brackets and on the table. Supper was something of a festivity. The Countess made her preference for candle-light the occasion of a philippic against the intrusion of modern illumination which, she maintained, ruined the effectiveness of delicately colored decoration and made the beautiful skin of women ugly. Count Castellani, courtier that he was, hastened to agree with her.

Next morning, while Erasmus and he were strolling in the park after breakfast, he said: "The dear Countess thinks that by lighting twenty-five candles she can create an eighteenth century atmosphere—as if the eighteenth century were a trick of illumination! They are all that way nowadays. Full of vain pretension.

A charming, agreeable woman, but no *chic* whatever. Good intentions and pitiful style."

Georg Ulrich Castellani was a bit lonely at Rienburg. He had no interest in women. He might respect certain of them as members of society and as gifted individuals, but in general he hid his contempt for them under a veneer of good form. Sexually, they were nonexistent so far as he was concerned. He had arranged to spend the winter here, and he considered himself, historically speaking, a refugee. He had been the late Dettingen's closest friend, and Sebastiane looked upon him with shy admiration. It was rumored that he employed his leisure in the country in the composition of his memoirs, for this was the principal occupation of the highest aristocracy after the autumn of 1918. Certainly he had an abundance of material, for though he was only forty-six years old, he had been involved in all the significant international negotiations from Algeciras to Brest-Litovsk.

Polyxene said about him to Erasmus: "One learns things of him that are not to be found in books. When he talks, he is irresistible; when he is silent, there is something ghastly about him,—an aura of fate." Erasmus was eager to know what she meant by "an aura of fate." She enjoyed telling him.

Aglaia was daring enough to make fun of Georg Ulrich when she spoke of him to Erasmus. She would mimic the modest fashion he had of lowering his eyes whenever he shot one of his poisoned arrows into the conversation. She said that one day in Paris he had sent his servant out into the street to fetch a doorman, and when the man came in Georg Ulrich had merely

asked him the address of the nearest hairdresser and tipped him handsomely.

None of the women made Erasmus feel that he had come down for a purpose; none of them seemed to know why he had come. In consequence, his timidity disappeared and he took the first step in the realization of that purpose. Not that he thought soberly of the yoke he was to assume. What he had in mind was the flattering notion of a conquest. But there began his difficulties. While four lovely and exceptional creatures spun their allurements about him, he forgot that two of them were not free objects of his choice. But his desire, in general, came alive. He was subtly conscious of the danger in thus straying from the path of salutary things, but he allowed the sensible to be elbowed out of sight by the agreeable, and his courage and spirit of adventure grew with the gradual vanishing of his self-imposed reticences. It was pleasant to let oneself go, to swim in a stream of mingled fiction and reality, which was his true element. And as his inhibitions dropped away, the more fascinating aspects of his character revealed themselves.

When the five ladies, who were in effect five conspirators, became aware of his susceptibility, they took care to further the activity of his charm. This went on, of course, in secret, in the course of private discussions between two or three, or all of them, no trace of it being overtly displayed. They were only too well aware that one imprudent step might ruin everything. Pauline remained passive during these councils, and was indeed called in only to receive instructions or to be reprimanded for the commission of some awkward gesture. They all knew that if their plan was to suc-

ceed, Pauline must be pushed into the foreground and allowed every opportunity to shine.

In theory, their plan was sound and logical and easily carried out. In practice, however, they had to reckon with the adversary. Polyxene found it disagreeable to be forced to forego Erasmus's society as soon as Pauline appeared on the scene. She complained a bit peevishly that she enjoyed a chat with an intelligent person and saw no point in evading him when he sought her out. Sebastiane, for her part, declared that it was beneath her dignity to assist in the affair, since they had no means of knowing whether Erasmus was sympathetic to their idea and willing to spend as much time with Pauline as they rashly assumed. Yet it was she who, before Erasmus's arrival, had most vigorously advocated the marriage and given excellent advice to her younger sister. Pauline, in turn, complained chiefly of Aglaia, who, she said, intruded upon every conversation, made a nuisance of herself with her aggressive coquetry, and apparently could not endure to go unnoticed for as much as five minutes. Aglaia laughed at the charge and answered brightly that people should take their fun where they found it, and if the others thought they could outshine her they had only to try. She had no mind to play Cinderella. The Countess essayed to calm them, appealing to Polyxene's pride, to Sebastiane's intelligence, to Aglaia's generosity. But all her words could only establish a peace of brief duration.

Meanwhile, Erasmus was ignorant of these disputes that arose about him, and which he fostered in his callous innocence. Impulse and the hour were his guides to these momentary inclinations and seductions. He

took what was offered him and never troubled what might be hidden behind walls or bright faces.

There was a faint aura of melancholy about Lix that fascinated him. Her head was the head of families that are dying—too small for the body—while her hands and shoulders were also smaller than should be. She walked like an Englishwoman, setting her feet firmly to the ground and moving with slightly quivering thighs. Sexual disquiet shone in her eyes. Her nostrils quivered constantly like those of a suspicious deer. She spoke with bitterness of her wasted life and rehearsed the consolations of astral science. Erasmus would listen to her with charming attentiveness. His few interruptions were directed rather towards her glance, her mouth, her throat, her dark voice, or the silent, feverish promise of her soul, than towards her conversation.

Then Sebastiane would come in with her pale face, small head, and graceful, harmonious bearing. She was intelligent, but curt and suspicious. Erasmus had thought her devoid of spirit until the morning when he had seen her set upon a large village dog who had attacked and bitten her little bull. She had grabbed the dog's hind legs and dragged him off, frightened him away, and then turned towards Erasmus with a face of blazing fury. He had led her to a well where she had washed her blood-covered hand while he stood by in silence. Suddenly he had regretted having flown from her six years before. She had probably sensed his feeling, for she smiled furtively in her anger. This picture of her remained in his mind, the image of a person who knows much and conceals it all, conceals her thoughts and the might of her blood. But she had two

children: she was a mother, and therefore less accessible than her sisters. These children, one of them two and the other four years old, stood like guards over her, and for some obscure reason Erasmus envied her the children, as if he were himself a barren woman in the presence of a more fortunate one. Because of the children she seemed to Erasmus a more exalted, a purer being, certainly one more remote and sheltered from desire.

His experience with Pauline did not differ from that with other young girls. One always reached a dead point with them, and then in weariness and boredom, perhaps out of good nature or malice, one let oneself go and said something rash or stupid that turned out to be compromising. There was no finesse about girls, no simplicity or moderation, nothing but the dullest and most patent revelation of one's goal. Why did he always want to compare them to fog-hens? He laughed. What the deuce was a fog-hen, anyway?

Here was the fog-hen he was expected to ensnare. She was destined for him. He had been prepared for her. She was the heroine of this comedy. One of his most marked characteristics was the assumption of a mood of heedless submission in the presence of external pressure. Let any one issue an order to him and immediately that order filled his mind to the point of stultification—which did not mean that he would ultimately not leave it unexecuted. But he had first to make up his mind not to obey it. Only thereafter did things resume their normal course.

At the moment he was undecided, half captivated and half repelled, now curious and now suspicious. Countess Pauline had a voluptuous body, the face of a china doll, and eyes of almost unsuitable transparency. She

was pensive, usually lost in herself. She would lower her head while he spoke to her, and the odor of fresh wheat in the sheaf would rise from her Nordic, yellow hair. She had developed late; she was still a prey to the slumbrous lassitude of newly awakened adolescence —or perhaps it were truer to say that she had only now become its prey. She went to confession every week and had a *prie-Dieu* in her room. Erasmus was sufficiently experienced in these matters to divine that she was striving towards him with all her full, undisillusioned young heart. The clarity and the seriousness of his position embarrassed him. The trap was there, ready to be sprung. He was on his guard, watching the beleaguered road. He had a holy fear of surprise attacks. Yet, he could not resist the lure and the lulling of his scruples by the uncertainty, the curiosity, and the urge of his emotions. It was almost in distress that he turned for refuge to the slippery, evasive Aglaia.

This girl of seventeen was like a gurgling, bubbling, refreshing and ever flowing fountain. She was one of those beings who, while they are still children, are everything a woman can be or become—friend, mother, mistress, wife, strumpet—everything exalted or depraved. She could say things that would make an exhausted worldling blush for shame, and yet she still loved her dolls tenderly and sentimentally. She was restless; she had a sweet tooth; she was impatient, moody, violent. She lied when she was bored and pretended like an actress out of pure excess of energy. She would make movements and gestures at times that were like those of a wild and tropical negress, accustomed to nudity. She would weep or laugh about nothing at all,

and was the despot of the household. Erasmus rode with her and had promised to fence with her.

On one of the first afternoons of his visit, Erasmus met her in the upper hall. "If you come with me," she said, "I'll show you something." From the beginning, she had assumed a confidential tone with him, the tone common to crafty and innocent alike, which women invariably assumed after a brief acquaintance with Erasmus. She led him through a number of empty rooms into the ancestral hall, whose walls were hung with portraits. She stopped before the portrait of a bold-eyed woman covered with jewels, and said: "That is my great-great-grandmother, whom I am supposed to resemble. She was a Polish woman. They say she had more than a dozen lovers and so many casual adventures that Louis XV used often to ask the Russian ambassador: 'What news have you of Princess Barbara Szelinska?' There was a revolution in Warsaw, and she rode a horse at the head of the revolutionists. The first bullet fired by the Russians struck her in the heart. Don't you agree that that is how a noblewoman should live and die?"

She pronounced the word noblewoman as if it were a phrase in a song.

Erasmus felt himself obliged to answer with caution. He said that so far as the number of the lady's lovers was concerned, whether her career was to be idealized or not depended on the times in which she lived. Besides, history was sometimes prone to exaggeration in these matters. Nowadays, so far as he could judge, ladies were less given to such expansiveness, while women were prized according to different standards. People were being driven to various expedients and

were forced to be able to maintain themselves in any of them.

Aglaia looked at him with sparkling eyes, examining him from head to foot, at first indignantly and then roguishly. When he had finished, she exclaimed: "Erasmus, the dead awaken! Look at the cold perspiration breaking out all over great-grandmother Barbara!"

He looked up with embarrassment and annoyance and shook his head. Then he glanced at the long-legged girl who stood there making fun of him in charming impudence. A gleam of desire, falsehood, yearning came into his eyes. He came closer and Aglaia laughed. She crossed her hands behind her neck and stiffened. Glancing hastily towards the door, he kissed her on the mouth. She shut her eyes for a second, laughed again, but much more softly, and ran away.

Very shortly he discovered that silent consent had been given to his attempts at seduction. They were even expected of him. He evaded Aglaia fearfully, but without renouncing her, without withdrawing from the field. Meanwhile the others, each in her own way, became more desirable to him, and he created confusion in the breasts of all four of them.

He was not frivolous about them. He was no seducer. He was full of conscience and righteousness. The seduction he exercised was neither intriguing nor enterprising; even less was it vicious. He was flexible and susceptible; his strength was in his own liability to seduction, in the response of his changing face to his changing desires, in the assent and submission with which he was ready to listen to any of them. There was also the fact that he combined the attitude of a

comrade and a friend with half-fearful and half-audacious promises which had nothing to do either with comradeship or friendship. And he possessed what Lix Lerchenfeld called the magnetism of affinity.

Nor was he entirely at ease about the havoc he wrought. His imagination had to reject too many images; too many notions and lures had to be locked out of his thoughts. He was breathless with the task of ridding his mind of one impression in order to yield to the next. He had eternally to define the frontiers of his spheres of interest, to weigh his words, to disentangle the responsibilities. On every hand, he found himself caught in a net, entangled by a whispered question, discerning a plot in an unveiled exchange of glances, divining significance in a smile, a moment of silence, a gesture. The bodies about him were pregnant with secrets. Each pair of eyes spied on the others, hated the homage of the glance they cast on Erasmus, hated their rivalry and emulation. Erasmus was forced to spend his time in conciliation; otherwise chaos would have invaded his infidelity.

Once, as they all sat together at table, Sebastiane bent over him wih a bowl of fruit. Inaudible tremors arose: there was no need for her to move so close to him. Erasmus was heartened by it. His lips quivered at the proximity of the white shoulders. He thirsted for her with a thirst for entire purity. He thought, and could not remember, where he had heard the phrase: Young widowhood is a clear pool.

Aglaia's kiss had tempted him. He dreamed of her slender, precious legs. He could not put out of his mind one thing the headstrong girl had said to him: "I shall never sell myself. I shall give myself away";

and her eyes, it seemed to him, had added: "To-night, if you wish."

He sat with Polyxene before the fireplace in the drawing-room while she read in a soulful voice out of a book on metempsychosis. His eyes were fixed on her hands that were as slim as certain fish. When she turned a page, it seemed to him that these ivory fingers were tapping on his skin. He told her of meeting a Brahmin in Benares, and she listened with her head on one side while the firelight danced in her hair. She listened, and smiled in a curious, ambiguous fashion. For both of them, what they were saying and what they were thinking were not at all the same.

He walked with Pauline beside the river. Suddenly, in the shrubbery beside the road, she saw a couple embracing, shameless, blind and deaf to the world. It was an inconceivably painful sight. Pauline went white, and all but fainted a few steps farther on. He offered her his arm, and her whispered thanks as well as her agitation, touched him. He managed to divert her thoughts from the couple, and it seemed to him as he spoke that she was pressing against him trustfully, unconsciously, like a young animal. That frightened him; he grew uneasy, picked his words, felt himself a sinner—and still was tangled in the net.

He sat down one evening, in an interval between exaltation and self-reproach, to write to Marietta. Nothing came of it. He began three letters, and each time he came a cropper mid-way. Once it was because he realized that he had revealed too much; another time because he found himself reproaching her jealousy while describing a feeling which he recognized only at the moment of describing it; the last time because what

he wrote turned out to be an involved and totally incoherent screed which, although it reflected his state of mind admirably, was the most detestable of them all. He went disgruntled to bed and tried to put himself to sleep by counting from one to one thousand and one over and over again into gray eternity.

The next day a telegram came, announcing the arrival on the following day of Ferry Sponeck and one Eugen Sparre, a friend whom he was bringing. None of the household had ever heard of Sparre, although the ladies cudgeled their brains in an attempt to give significance to the name. At dinner, however, Georg Ulrich Castellani enlightened them. Laughing behind the drooping mustache that fell like a black curtain of silk over the corners of his mouth, he said: "Sparre? Oh, yes. I remember. Ferry has told me about him. He is a young medical student, or interne, who challenges the value of all hitherto existent science and follows his own method. I have no idea that his method may be one that works; it is probably theoretical. Ferry has a ridiculous crush on him. Last year, when he was suffering from neuralgia, this what's-his-name, Sparre, cured him completely, and now Ferry swears by him. But one has to forgive Ferry his little *bêtises*. Occasionally he goes too far, but he is always harmless, and what is harmless does no harm."

The ladies looked forward with interest to Sparre's arrival. Aglaia hoped he had invented a horse cure; the cob had refused to eat all day, and she intended to ask this Sparre for a prescription. Whereupon the Countess remarked reproachfully that creative people should be treated with respect, and a name like Sparre was no reason to make fun of a man. Besides, she con-

cluded, Ferry Sponeck was old enough to know whom he could and couldn't bring to stay with his friends.

They had reached their dessert when the steward of the estate came in and reported that trouble had broken out in the surrounding villages. An armed mob had attacked the forestry station of Prince Colalto the night before.

Castellani's face darkened, and he said: "*Bien.* We'll shoot, too."

"What about you, Erasmus?" asked Sebastiane, putting her hand on the shoulder of her elder daughter; "will you defend us?"

"I wish," said Erasmus, "that I were eloquent enough to rest your mind about that."

The Countess and Georg Ulrich started their nightly game of *piquet.*

The mystery of Ferry Sponeck's friendship for Eugen Sparre was not cleared up by their sight of the man. He was about twenty-six years old, had bristly brown hair, dressed with care, and preserved a taciturn silence. There was something suggesting the actor about his pleasant manner and his reserve. What attracted him in Count Sponeck's personality was also undiscoverable. He let Ferry's eulogies pass with indifference and begged the pardon of the others in a cool glance. Whether he was excusing himself or his patron was not clear. Occasionally, these eulogies were like the phrases in which men boast of a hunting trophy, or a cunningly acquired antique. Like most good-natured and uneducated aristocrats, Ferry had a boundless admiration, mixed with some superstition, for all men of science. He seemed to look upon Sparre

as his private physician, asking him silly questions about hygiene, the danger of contagion, the elements of prophylaxis. He tried hard to make Sparre grow talkative, and looked at him so devotedly, hung so reverently upon his words, that everybody joked about his behavior.

When the Countess, with that slightly exaggerated cordiality by the use of which one professes to ignore another's oddity or social inferiority, proceeded to assure Sparre of her pleasure at receiving him, he answered that the responsibility for his presence would have to be placed upon Sponeck. Ferry had painted her hospitality, and the sojourn at Rienburg, so alluringly that he had been unable to resist the temptation to come down. He added, without apparently realizing that his phrase was at once rude and humble, that he hoped he would give no trouble to his hostess. He had brought along some work on which he would have to be engaged during the greater part of the day.

His deep voice, by the way, had the same organlike resonance as Georg Ulrich Castellani's.

Erasmus was ill at ease when he found this pale face and these inquiring eyes opposite him at table. The others, too, were somewhat depressed, so that conversation was scanty, although the Countess did what she could to make it go pleasantly. All this, with fresh reports of pillage and rebellion, and with Ferry Sponeck's recital of events in the capital, did not make for gayety. The four sisters sat nervous and tense. Pauline did not raise her eyes, and scarcely touched her dinner. Aglaia's lips were pressed defiantly together. Polyxene smiled from time to time in sad renunciation. Sebastiane alone seemed unmoved, and

the clarity and power of her expression made her appear the most beautiful of them all. After coffee, Erasmus went with her into the conservatory and dared ask a question: Had there been a row?

He was feverishly agitated. The four wonderful creatures, who formed a fairy ring with him in their midst, drove him to sweet desperation. When one called him, he approached her as docilely as a page. Another looked him in the eyes, and he yielded on the instant. If he could have fused all four into one, he would have been able to make up his mind. And yet he craved the caresses of each of them individually; each differed from the others in passion, duration, art, and self-renunciation. Everything was sublimated as in a dream and as violent as pain. Lix's long repression gave promise of a great passion; Aglaia, of the sweetest imaginable tenderness; Pauline promised the boundless yielding of a virginal soul filled with almost awe-inspiring premonition of sexual bliss; Aglaia, again, displayed stirring symptoms of a reserved and passionate nature. They formed a group of haunting spirits, out of which, almost in another world, rose the mistress of them all, a woman armed with a great and cryptic power of summons and of admonition, a being half lost and half outcast.

"We are all very stupid," said Sebastiane without answering his question. She looked squarely at him and said in a soft voice: "Should we not be warned by these events in the world outside? We take no heed; like children, who cover their eyes in a thunderstorm."

Erasmus grew pale and muttered: "Perhaps you are right. Thunderstorm is a little too mild. Thunderstorms blow over. People think they have to grab at

every remaining scrap of joy and pleasure. The saying, *après nous le déluge*, used to be spoken in fun; to-day it has a lugubrious significance. It may be a crime to think as we do, but I believe you are right."

"It may not be a crime, but at least it makes us incapable of helping one another," she answered in a firm voice.

"Do you mean that one ought to still the voice of one's blood and heart?" he asked with an expression of affectionate servility.

She picked an azalea from a bush and began to strip off its petals. "I believe that you ought to act fairly," she whispered with closed eyes. He took her delicate white hand and pressed his lips to it, more enthusiastic than ever, less than ever ready to renounce her. Algaia came up through the dimly lighted hall. She was humming softly and her eyes had an impertinent gleam.

He excused himself from tea and spent the afternoon writing letters. As he was about to take them to the post-office in the village, the rain came down. He sent off a footman and remained in his room. From below arose the sound of a piano; very well played it was, better than any playing he had hitherto heard at Rienburg. It must be Sparre he thought, and frowned. There was something sinister about the name and the man. There were many like him nowadays. Time was when one had paid them no attention; now they forced themselves upon one's notice. Wondering why the man's face was so distasteful to him, he remembered finally that once, in Manchuria, he had come upon a Chinese statue, carved with evil mocking features, a deity of destruction, full of guile and diabolical spite. Sparre, he saw, had reminded him of that statue. It

was true that the idol had been disgustingly ugly, whereas this man might be called handsome and well built. Just the same, they had something in common.

He dressed for dinner and went down without waiting for the gong. On the stairs he met Lix, superb in a frock of dark green silk, with a collar of pearls about her neck. "What a shame that you didn't come down," she greeted him; "that man Sparre plays like a demon." Erasmus laughed inwardly at the encounter of her epithet and his discovery, and said that he disliked the piano. Meanwhile, Sparre had moved by with a catlike tread. He wore a dinner jacket and bowed ceremoniously.

Pauline was strolling to and fro over the black and white tiles with the village priest, who had been asked in. The Countess was upset. She told Erasmus that the postmaster had called an hour before to say that all the telegraph and telephone lines were down. She was telling him this when the old footman, Nikolas, came in and said nervously that the northern sky was filled with a glow that seemed to point to a great fire. They hurried to the windows and looked out at the deep purple glow that hung over the horizon.

Where can that fire be? they asked one another. Some one mentioned the names of the villages and estates that lay to the north. Erasmus turned hastily, for Gravenreuth was one of the names mentioned. Sebastiane shook her head in disagreement with the priest, who had pronounced the name. Gravenreuth lay more to the left, she said, in the direction of the forest. It was more likely Elmhof, where there was a brandy distillery. Ferry Sponeck wanted to know if, in case of need, the village could furnish a defense corps.

The Countess replied that she had discussed that with the schoolmaster and the burgomaster. Both were of the opinion that few dependable people would answer the call. Meanwhile, they assured her that for the present there was nothing to fear.

The wind brought by the rain came in and blew on the candle-light so that the windows had to be shut. The Countess drew Erasmus aside. Smiling, but scrutinizing him sharply, she asked if it were true that Countess Giese was at the moment a guest at Gravenreuth. Erasmus acknowledged that she did happen to be there. The Countess's smile perturbed him, but he forced himself to smile back and started to say a reassuring word. With delicate feeling, the Countess spared him this. She nodded in friendly fashion, with a hint of warning in her eye, took his arm, and they all went in to dinner.

In the course of the dinner everybody's spirits heightened. After a time the scattered conversations ceased, and they found themselves all listening to Georg Ulrich Castellani, who, as the Countess remarked, was particularly brilliant that evening. They got up from table and went into the smoking-room where they sat about the fireplace. Castellani had reached one of his favorite topics: the character and career of Charles V.

"To me," he began, "the Emperor has always appeared in the guise of a dark giant embroidered on an immense curtain of gold brocade. It sounds a bit ridiculous to say that a sixteenth century autocrat, who has long been a shadow among shadows, is closer to me than my dear friend Ferry Sponeck, but it is a fact. I see in him the purest embodiment of absolute sovereignty, matchless in the same degree since he died.

Absolute sovereignty is easy to say, but what does it really mean? It means purely and simply a summit of the world, a culmination of culture. The hour when he gave up his scepter is precisely the hour that marks the beginning of the process of destruction and dissolution in Europe. People have not realized this clearly enough; and no wonder, since historians have caricatured him so horribly. They have presented him as a malicious and phlegmatic man, an irritable invalid, a cowardly despot. In reality, he was, to begin with, an absolutely solitary man. Which is natural enough. An absolute ruler who is not a solitary man is unthinkable. Secondly, what a depth of dissimulation was in him! He was acutely aware of the insignificance of things human and the futility of all human activity. In his loneliness and on his height, everything appeared to him very small and very subject to change and very relative—including words, treaties, passions, misery, want, and death. Of course he was a dissembler. Everything was illusion. Thence came also his profound contempt for people. I am sure that since the world was first inhabited, people have never been despised as he despised them. This is the explanation of his respect for art, in which he found himself face to face with something absolute, like himself. How mysterious he was! He could not weep, he could not laugh, even while still a child. I remember an anecdote about one of the imprisoned electors: it was the Landgrave of Hesse, I think, who, kneeling before the Emperor, happened to purse his lips. He seemed to be laughing, but actually his feelings were quite otherwise. The Emperor looked at his lips and murmured menacingly in his strong Brabant dialect: 'You wait. I'll

teach you to laugh!' What a tremendous paradox he represented: the sun never set on his empire, and he hated the sunshine. He possessed the greatest power ever held by mortal man, and he gave it up to seek refuge in a monastery of the strictest observance. He dissembled even in the sight of God, for God, too, seemed to his incomparably mysterious mind merely a form. He pondered most the temptation of Christ. That bothered him. He could not understand it. Space and time were phantoms to him, conditioned by the immeasurable fulfilments of this life, which brought him immeasurable disgust. We have here an explanation of his constant travels, his restless rejection of immobility, and his strange fancy for clocks, all of which, however many he might possess, had to mark the same moment. Dissembling! It is true that in his father's corpse there was a ticking watch. His insane mother, Joanna, dragged the coffin with her through many lands, and in order to give herself the illusion that the corpse was alive, she had replaced the heart by a watch. That must have influenced him. I sense in it the tragic transformation of a soul from the majestic to the mechanic, that is, to desperation, the initial symbol of a new age. Yes, the watch may have been his idol and his handwriting on the wall. And yet, he was the Custodian—Custodian of the State, Custodian of Religion. A Jesuit once said to me that except for the Emperor, the Church would long since have ceased to exist. He preserved faith for humanity."

"Yes, with rods and scorpions, with instruments of torture and burning piles of faggots," came a voice so little different in timbre from Castellani's that the others did not at first comprehend the cutting contra-

diction. Only Erasmus had been prepared for it. While Georg Ulrich had been speaking, he had been gazing quietly at Sparre, who sat between Lix and Ferry Sponeck on the edge of the circle, with a mocking, sinister smile in the corners of his mouth. Sparre was not perturbed by the offense which he had patently given, or by the nervous glance that Ferry turned on him. He went on coolly: "He preserved faith for humanity at the price of the lives of hundreds of thousands of heretics burned at the stake, hundreds of thousands of innocent girls and women tortured to death as witches, hundreds of thousands of murdered Incas and Aztecs, and hundreds of thousands of Indians poisoned by alcohol and syphilis, in the name of the Cross."

The priest turned round in his chair. The Countess made a frightened gesture towards Pauline and Aglaia, whereat Aglaia raised her head and stared attentively at Sparre, who seemed not to notice it. "It may be well to add that the notion that syphilis was brought here from America is a fable invented and maliciously circulated by the Jesuits, doubtless for the greater glory of God. It came from the Orient long before those pious brigands, Cortez and Pizarro, changed flourishing empires into bloody deserts. But why speak of that?" he interrupted himself with a shrug. "You, Count Castellani, know that as well as I do. I am not of course familiar with dissimulation and cannot see anything either wonderful or admirable in it. Rather the contrary, for it seems to me the source of the evil, the damnable mummery, employed by the high lords of the earth to insure the success of their little aims, which

may be stated briefly as the systematic exploitation of mankind and the poisoning of politics."

He stared with wrinkled forehead at the ceiling, as if to evade the icy concern that appeared in all the faces about him.

After a pause, Georg Ulrich Castellani replied with exquisite politeness: "The ideas you have just expounded, Dr. Sparre, are undoubtedly valid." He leaned back in his chair with an air of peculiar triumph and went on. "I had no intention of criticizing conditions and facts, for such criticism lies outside my domain. My purpose was to gain a better comprehension for a character that stirs my imagination. I acknowledge readily that the most menacing weapons of a certain liberal phraseology—or radical if you prefer; it comes to the same thing—have been employed against this character. That is natural in our age, and demands slight courage. And, of course, bloody carnage is something infinitely terrible. But was such carnage ever prevented by the people? Had Robespierre, Cromwell, Lincoln, or Lenin less blood on his conscience than Jengiz Khan, Attila, Napoleon, or the great Frederick? But let us not, as editorial writers do, deal with the obvious facts. Enough harm has come of our lack of great lords, not to mention great men. An inevitable process: the primitive rock has been worn down, and what remains is mud and dirt. What is the good of sentimental excess? Blood is a building material. Each of us holds the spade that will bury some one else. Is the number killed, or the manner of the death, of any importance? This planet happens to be a cemetery. One kind of person enjoys ransacking the graves

of the multitude; another kind is happy to perform his devotion before the venerable monuments."

"I should never think of interfering with anybody's pastime," said Sparre dryly.

"In the days when the person of an Emperor was still a thing of mystery, the people had the joy of that additional great mystery," continued Castellani. "Majesty, anointed majesty: that was the highest peak reached by mankind; it was what held people in check and kept them reverent, even though the temporal representative might not be equal to the ideal for which he stood. Perhaps I may be allowed to illustrate this by a little episode that occurred in the life of one of my ancestors. I think we can thus take the sting out of our discussion—a circumstance the ladies will welcome. Almost at the same time, I came upon this story in some old family papers and in the memoirs of the Duc de Saint-Simon, who tells it a bit more coarsely. It is interesting, also, that this story treats of dissimulation, that practice proscribed by Dr. Sparre. My family originated in France, and the ancestor of whom I speak was in residence at the court of Louis XIV. He was sent by his monarch on a mission of the highest importance to Emperor Leopold in Vienna. Arriving late one evening, he changed his attire, sent his footman to the imperial palace to announce his coming, and followed shortly after. When he arrived, he was told that his Majesty was expecting him. After leading him through dim corridors and a number of dark rooms, the lackey stopped before a door and asked him to go in. The room was small. At one end he saw a long, narrow table, on it a lone candle, and behind it a single chair. Facing the door, leaning negligently against the

table, stood a rather irritated looking man, dressed in black. His arms were folded. The ambassador took this person to be a courtier or an official waiting for an audience, for he fancied himself in an anteroom. He commenced to pace back and forth, his expression and gestures indicating poorly concealed impatience. The man at the table followed him with his eyes and his head, remaining meanwhile silent and grave. Thus passed fifteen minutes, and then a half hour, at the end of which time my ancestor's patience became exhausted. Addressing his supposed companion in misfortune in a somewhat brusque tone, he asked if the emperor had been informed of his presence and would receive him. The man replied quietly: 'I am the Emperor.' The ambassador sank to his knees as if struck by lightning, trembled, stammered, was unable to bring forth one word concerning his mission. Flunkeys were called to work over him and bring him back to consciousness. . . . That was the glory, the influence of the unknown, the mysterious."

Sparre's laughter sounded forced. He answered: "At the risk of incurring your displeasure, I must confess that I see neither glory nor mystery in it. I see on the one hand an infantile mind and a despicable Byzantine tradition, and on the other all the arrant mischief and the repulsive arrogance of the family that placed so many heartless, ignorant, solitary, misanthropic puppets on a throne. At best, they were noble, pedigreed animals who abused their power to sow discord between the nations in order to live in easy street themselves, deceive faithful servants, and promote flatterers and shady characters to high posts. There has

been too much incense and lying, too much suffering in the name of a bugbear—."

Erasmus stood up. "I think we have had enough of this unnecessary discussion," he exclaimed sharply.

Castellani turned towards him with a smile of pleasure. "Would you be good enough to hand me the ash tray?" he begged.

"Perhaps Dr. Sparre will play something for us," the Countess put in tactfully.

Sparre also had risen. "I am afraid the necessary receptive mood is not present, Countess," he answered with a stiff bow.

The Countess turned to Lix and said almost audibly in a mocking tone: "He has made about all the *gaffes* possible, hasn't he?"

Ferry Sponeck sat in misery, running his hand through his hair. He had finally sensed that something was wrong. "Tell me, Mumu," he whispered to Erasmus, "just what did happen?"

The sound of an approaching carriage was heard. Sebastiane, who was standing beside Erasmus, listened attentively. A carriage at this hour was extraordinary. The others listened also. Erasmus answered Ferry Sponeck's question: "Have you forgotten what I told you the other day? That open rebellion is the work of the Devil? Did you have to bring Satan here among us?"

Nikolas came hurriedly in and whispered a few words into the ear of the Countess. She sprang up with a pale, altered face, and said to her frightened daughters, who had gathered about her: "Frau von Gravenreuth is here with . . . Countess Giese. The castle is in flames and they have fled."

"God have mercy upon us!" murmured the priest.

Everybody was thoroughly scared out of his wits. Pauline burst into tears. Aglaia took up a candlestick and set it down again. The Countess hurried out into the hall. Erasmus, white as a sheet, started to follow her, but stopped on the threshold. Georg Ulrich Castellani paced back and forth, muttering from time to time: "*Nom de Dieu! nom de Dieu!*" Sebastiane and Lix went after their mother. Sparre's tie had come undone, and he reknotted it with a worried air.

The women had flown precipitately. At seven o'clock a gang of twelve men had forced their way into the castle, demanding money and food. Frau von Gravenreuth had argued with them and given them a sum of money and two sacks of flour. As they were leaving, an altercation arose between certain of them and the coachman. There was a chaotic row, and five minutes later the stables were afire. What happened thereafter, how they were able to get a few things together and climb into one of the farm wagons, where the team had come from in the pouring rain, and who had brought it, the refugees did not know. It was enough that, with the burning castle at their backs, they had been able to escape in the middle of the night, and there they were: Frau von Gravenreuth, Marietta Giese, little Wolf and his nurse, two maids, the coachman, and a peasant lad of sixteen, all wet to the skin, with dripping clothes and hair, as if they had been shipwrecked.

Marietta had to be put to bed immediately, chattering with fever. The village doctor was sent for. The priest offered to try to collect a group of young people in the village who might be induced to guard the house. Frau von Gravenreuth, a simple and dignified woman

of fifty, had succeeded in retaining her poise even in this state of affairs. When she had changed her clothes and seen Wolf to bed, she gave a more detailed report, and expressed her fears for Marietta. Lix and Sebastiane had gone up to Countess Giese. Their mother was busy giving orders about beds and clothes. Erasmus was able to say a few words to Frau von Gravenreuth alone: "Did you not have another guest, Baroness?" he asked discreetly; "it seems to me that Marietta said something to that effect." She replied that a Herr van der Muylen had been with them. "He was called away by a telegram two days ago. Some people are lucky," she added, looking searchingly at Erasmus. "And who is the boy?" asked Erasmus. "Wolf is my ward. He has lived with me all his life. His mother is . . . she is dead. She was my best friend. Isn't he a beautiful child?" Again she examined him with searching, colorless eyes. "I do hope these impressions will not weigh upon his young mind," she went on; "mine will never be free of them." Erasmus took her hand, kissed it, and said: "I sympathize with you deeply, very deeply. That is a hollow phrase; but I know what you have been through."

The servant sent to the village returned to say that the doctor was in bed with the grippe and would not be able to come. Immediately thereafter, Sebastiane came in and reported that Countess Marietta's condition was very grave; her fever had risen patently and she complained of severe headache. The Countess said to Helene Gravenreuth: "I don't know where to turn. It is an hour on horseback to the nearest town; and even if I were able to send some one in this weather and the

uncertain temper of the whole region, it is doubtful that the doctor would come in the middle of the night."

"It is impossible to leave her much longer without medical aid," answered Frau von Gravenreuth.

Eugen Sparre came forward, and said with his formal reserve: "If I might offer my services, Countess, I believe I could replace my local colleague."

The Countess assented joyfully, and said to Frau von Gravenreuth, who had just sighed with relief: "Dr. Sparre is a clever young physician of the new school." To Sparre she said: "How fortunate that you are here, and how kind of you—."

Meanwhile, Erasmus had gone to Ferry Sponeck, grabbed him by the arm, and dragged him into a window embrasure with unusual violence. Whispering hurriedly, with menacing determination and with trembling lips and eyelids, he said: "Listen, Ferry. You have got to prevent this. Prevent it at any cost, if you don't want me to be your sworn enemy. You were fool enough to bring him here, and you must do me this service. He must not enter Marietta's room, do you understand! I can't bear the thought of him touching her. It is unbearable. Go to him immediately; make it clear to him; you may refer him to me. Give him any reason that occurs to you, and tell him that if he insists upon going through with it, I shall shoot him. Like a dog, without ceremony, do you understand? Of course a man like that cannot be expected to keep this from the ladies, but perhaps you can manage that, too. But in no circumstances must he approach her room. I had rather she died!"

Ferry Sponeck listened to him in amazement, but he understood. Seeing Erasmus in such a state, he

grasped the fact of danger. "Calm yourself, Mumu," he said; "I'll do it." Going back into the room, he saw that Sparre was on his way with Sebastiane to the door. Following him out into the hall, he said: "Sparre! One word with you, please," and led him into a corner. Meanwhile, Sebastiane went upstairs, expecting that Sparre would follow her.

Erasmus also had gone into the hall. He ordered a servant to bring down a hat and a coat from his room. Calling old Nikolas, he explained that he himself would drive to fetch a doctor from Grünau in the coach. Nikolas objected: "Your Excellency cannot go alone! It is midnight and pitch dark. Besides—" "I am not afraid," Erasmus interrupted; "I can drive and find the way alone if there is nobody with courage enough to accompany me. But say nothing. The Countess does not need to know of this for the present."

The footman came down with his hat and coat, and Erasmus and Nikolas went out to the stables. They awoke the coachman, who grumbled about exposing his horses in the inclement weather. A stable-boy, tempted by a tip, agreed to go along. Ten minutes later the horses were running swiftly down the road through a darkness that closed around them like a black fungus. The northern sky was still a ruddy glow.

Erasmus wore a leather cape and hood which the coachman had provided. Trees, poles, houses, bridges, duck ponds flew past in scarcely recognizable outline. The horses' hoofs sounded on the wet ground in a rapid rhythm. Erasmus's eyes stared beyond their heads at the road, dimly lighted by the lamps of the coach, while glittering threads of rain hung in the pale light. At

each crossroads he pulled on the reins and asked the way of his drowsy companion.

He could not think, but he could see. He could see Marietta tortured by fever, her head on the pillows. He saw her suffering body, that he knew so well. He saw Lix and Sebastiane moving hurriedly about the room, and each of their movements was like a breath of perfume to him. He saw Sparre's cynically attentive face, the quintessence of everything hateful, and he wondered whence came this hatred, so entirely foreign to his nature. He saw Pauline standing at a window, dreaming, gazing forebodingly into the night. He saw Aglaia surveying him with knowing and defiant eyes. And again he saw Marietta, torn by pain, dying, perhaps. And then a boy's face. Who was the boy? Everything grew vague before his eyes. How weary one got. Handsome and slender, the boy was. . . .

They reached the first houses of the little town.

At three in the morning, Erasmus was back, accompanied by Dr. Schmidthammer. Marietta was out of her head. Compresses had been applied. Sparre's incomprehensible refusal to treat her, directly after his offer of treatment, had reacted on them all as some new and hateful disaster. He had retired to his room and sent word of his refusal through Sponeck. Ferry had appeased the offended Countess as well as he was able, and had ended by giving his word that Sparre was entirely blameless in the affair. Circumstances had arisen which had forced him to give up his plan. The Countess commented with heat that she understood not a word he was saying. Then Georg Ulrich Castellani put in maliciously: "Our friend Erasmus has discov-

ered his *bête noire;* that is probably what has happened."

They sat in silence and bewilderment, and only gradually did the connection become clear. It grew patent when they learned that Erasmus, without a word to any of them, had driven to Grünau to fetch the town doctor, despite storm and danger.

Castellani spoke up. "I remember a story about a Marquis de Suresne, who had the greatest hatred against the Jacobins and *sans-culottes*, although he had never seen one of them in his life. He was attacked one day by several highwaymen near his castle in Normandy. His cries brought to his assistance a passer-by, who saved him by a show of incredible courage and strength. The marquis was most eloquent in expressing his thanks. But when he learned, later, that his rescuer was a leading Jacobin, he hanged himself, saying that he disdained a life that he owed to a professed enemy of mankind. Absurd, of course, but not without character. I am fond of such absurdities; I collect them as other people collect coins or snuff-boxes." It was plain, nevertheless, that the Countess was still angry.

Dr. Schmidthammer spent the night at Marietta's bedside. Thus, Erasmus managed to snatch a few hours of sleep. When he got up at about eight o'clock, his head was buzzing. He opened his windows and saw with astonishment a cloudless sky and breathed in the blue air that was as clear as crystal.

Marietta's maid told him that the patient's fever was still high, but she had ceased to rave and was star-

ing with fixed eyes, as if unconscious. Frau von Gravenreuth was with her.

The sunshine was deceptive, glassy clear, but cold. The mud sucked one's boots while walking. The day was grave, despite the brilliant air. Erasmus breakfasted alone with Ferry, for the ladies were still asleep. Ferry told him that Sparre was leaving. He had gone to the railway station at seven in the morning to inquire about trains, and had learned with indignation that there had been no service these three days past. Ferry stared with frightened eyes at Erasmus while he spoke.

"That is very unfortunate," murmured Erasmus.

"He won't leave his room," said Ferry consolingly. "He will tell them that he is indisposed and will take his meals upstairs."

"It is unfortunate just the same," insisted Erasmus.

He felt as if doors were open which should have been closed, and others closed which should be standing open. He racked his brain to discover an expedient that would bring him to Marietta's side. Through all the walls of the house, her lamentation trickled into his ears.

The Countess greeted him coldly, so that he thought explanations necessary. As he spoke, he warmed to his task. "You must realize, Countess," he said, "that the man makes my blood boil whenever I set eyes on him. His words seem to me so much filth scooped up out of the gutter. Don't you feel it? Don't you see in his face all the evil, all the misery that is now assailing us? The presumption of godless creatures, the cynicism that is besmirching our altars and brushing aside contemptuously the imperial purple? . . ."

"That man? That man in particular?" exclaimed the Countess, half in jest and half in terror. "You

exaggerate, Erasmus; you exaggerate monstrously."

"I exaggerate so little that all the things I cannot express would appear ten times as monstrous and patent. Believe me, we are that man's victims. I smell it; my nerves tell me so. If we had more instinct about such creatures, we should never have come to this pass where we are about to stretch forth our necks like cattle led to slaughter. He is not only an exponent of rebellion, but its incarnation, I tell you. That he should have turned up among us seems to me the finger of fate. That is why—don't you see?—I gagged at the idea of his approaching a woman's sickbed, even in the guise of a physician. He is still Sparre, whether doctor or plain mister. And a woman who was once dear to me, who is still close to me! Surely, you can understand that."

"I understand some of it, at least, Erasmus," said the Countess, a bit softened. "But, my dear friend, you must see, on the other hand, that the situation is impossible. Marietta very ill in my house; you here; the girls. . . . It is impossible. Something must be done to clear up this situation. It cannot remain as it is."

Erasmus was embarrassed. Her hint was unmistakable. "I beg of you, Countess," he implored; "give me time; twenty-four hours, at least, or two days if you can. I have been completely bowled over, and need a little time to summon my thoughts."

The Countess laughed, and tried to calm Erasmus, whose agitation was plain. "Well, well," she said; "don't make me out a blood-thirsty tigress. Of course I'll give you two days. Why not? Compose yourself. The situation is not hopeless. Courage, my poor

friend." She smiled as she held out her hand, but there were wrinkles of distrust about her eyes.

This conversation was followed by a stroll in the park with Aglaia and a chat with Pauline.

Pauline sat reading at a window in the music-room. He went over to her without really wanting to do so. His forehead still quivered, and he smiled absent-mindedly and rather insipidly. The kindly tone in which he addressed her was mechanical. She raised her eyes to his, lowered them immediately, put up her book, and crumpled her lace handkerchief in her hand. "I keep thinking of Countess Marietta," she said. "How beautiful she was, last night, as she stood there, wet and miserable, in the hall. I have always imagined that martyrs must look like that." She hesitated, looked at him again, and once more evaded his hesitant, shifty, guilty glance. "May one yield to envy?" she asked. "It is a deadly sin, I know; yet I envy Countess Marietta; I envy her beyond measure, beyond all words. I envy her in the most secret places of my soul."

"Why, Pauline?" Erasmus asked in perplexity; "why do you envy Marietta?"

"I don't know," whispered the girl. "I can't say. But if a miracle were possible, and I could be Marietta from this moment until to-night, and I had to die in the night to compensate for the miracle, I should not hesitate one second."

"How strange," murmured Erasmus with a shake of his head. Her words seemed to paralyze him. He looked down at her, at the Nordic yellow hair, the velvety cheek, the trembling upper lip, all of which exercised a harrowing power over him that he tried to

shake off. He excused himself lamely, and left her.

Aglaia was coming down the stairs. She asked him to walk out with her. "I was looking for you," she said.

So long as they were within hearing distance of the house, they remained silent. Erasmus looked back and slackened his pace. It was as if he thought he had neglected something by going too far from the house.

"I know that you are wishing us all in Hades," began Aglaia in her clear bold voice. "We are a terrible nuisance to you, and you yourself don't know why. Your life has been attempted, and the attempt has failed. Poor thing! I should so much like to help you out of your hole, since I can't help us. How are we going to set about?"

"You must not talk that way, Aglaia," begged Erasmus.

"Nonsense, I insist upon talking as I feel," Aglaia replied. "I never liked the business anyway; and the better I got to know you, the less I liked it. But here is Pauline, feeling inwardly that she is engaged, and that is no small matter with a person of her nature. She might perhaps be told that the situation would be worse if she were your wife, but she wouldn't believe it. Don't interrupt me, Erasmus. I have made up my mind to lecture you, and I am going to do it. For you to think of marrying at all is criminal heedlessness. Are you serious about it? God forbid! You are like an Indian on the war-path. You stick colored feathers in your hair, paint your face, and crawl through the woods to waylay some passer-by. Lord help the squaw you lead to your wigwam! What would happen there —*je vois ça d'ici.* If she were my friend, I should beg

her on my knees to think and think again, and then run away. All of which does not mean, Erasmus," she went on with a mixture of roguishness and deep feeling in her face, "that I do not appreciate your qualities. Only, they are not the rock on which I should care to build."

Erasmus was disconcerted. "I am astonished," he said, "that you dare to judge me that way; so decidedly, so . . . daringly. Where did you ever get so much insight, so much knowledge, into that little head?"

She answered caustically: "Don't be contemptuous of youth, Erasmus. There are gray-haired idiots, and there are seventeen-year-old countesses with common sense. A pair of eyes may be useful for all sorts of things; mine tell me that any heart given to you is unmercifully pulled to bits. It hurts you to do it, but you can't help it."

Erasmus nodded sadly. "If only it were not so hard, Aglaia," he said in his muffled voice. "But one never knows what is right. Whenever a person has made up his mind about the right thing to do, people come along and bewilder him by their comments. You love a person—which is all very well; but do you know how long that love will last? The woman you love always imagines that it will last forever. Can a man ever tell how much his love means to a woman? Can he tell whether or not she is deceiving herself? Whether he is really doing her a kindness in making her believe that she means as much to him as she would like? These are terrible responsibilities. Up above is a Law; that Law has to be fulfilled; but at the moment when a situation becomes serious, one is afraid to take the decisive step. The responsibility is too great. There are clear indi-

cations, but one may be interpreting them wrongly. One cannot undo things once done. I have to be careful not to let myself be deceived by my senses. I am not alone in the world and sufficient unto myself; I am but an individual in a multitude, and I owe somebody a reckoning. I cannot allow myself to move in doubt. I shall make my decision when I am able to feel that what I decide is God's will. The fact that thus far I have abstained means that God's will has not yet manifested itself. A man should be careful not to act prematurely." He looked ill as he wiped the perspiration from his brow.

Aglaia folded her hands and stared with comic desperation into the sky. "Oh, Erasmus," she sighed; "you break my heart. And to think that there are people who expect an innocent girl to pin her faith on you. Your insides must be an awful sight! Worse than ten Egyptian plagues. No, in Heaven's name, no!" She went on in a confiding tone: "Look here, Erasmus, I am not dry tinder to catch fire at the first spark. Yet, I believe I am in love with you. Why should I deny it? I believe I could do mad things for you; not very mad, just moderately mad things. Don't draw any conclusions from what I say, please. Take it as if I had said good morning. Besides, once the fact is accepted, there is no magic in it. And how nice that I should have discovered for myself that it must remain magic, and nothing more. The other thing, reality, would be terrible with you. Only a saint or an actress could endure it."

Erasmus stared out at the foggy, glittering plain, his curious smile hovering at the corners of his mouth. Magic, he thought; yes, once upon a time. But never

again. The dial of the clock of life marked a new hour. What this immature, cleverly audacious girl had said was too wise, it struck home too hard; it was not quite proper, he reflected.

They had strolled aimlessly towards a pavilion amid the flower beds where Sebastiane sat sunning herself in a garden chair. Near by, her two daughters were playing in the sand, while seven-year-old Wolf stood looking on. When he saw Aglaia and Erasmus, he came towards them with charming politeness and shook hands. Sebastiane looked at the child's face with some perplexity, and said: "Curious. Who is it that he looks like? He resembles somebody strikingly." Aglaia was struck by the same notion. The two young women fixed their eyes on Erasmus's face. Suddenly, they knew. They blushed and said nothing.

Aglaia went back to the house, and Erasmus took a chair. He chatted at intervals with Sebastiane, who was fatigued by her lack of sleep during the night. He gazed often at the boy, observing his movements, his hands, his feet, his expression. When Wolf spied a squirrel in a distant tree and went after it on the tips of his toes, Erasmus arose and followed him. He spoke to him formally, as to an adult. He liked the boy's voice, his unobtrusive and spirited fashion of answering, his trusting glance, the oval of his face. He took Wolf by the hand and walked on with him, astonished at himself, for never before had he been drawn to a child or looked twice at one. His affection for Sebastiane's children was a reflection of his interest in their mother.

The small, dry, warm hand that he held made him feel old. He seemed to himself like a tree, weighed

down with years, loaded with the remembrance of much bad weather, many stormy days and nights, frost, and the heat of the sun. The boy beside him, whose head came not far above his hips, seemed to him a sapling, tender and strong, noble and flexible, growing up towards a fearful and mysterious future. Suddenly he hated the gravel paths, and the white façade of the manor was like a prison wall. "Would you like to go with me down by the river, Wolf?" he asked. The boy was glad to go.

"Tell me a story," he begged.

Erasmus thought for a long time. When they reached the low bank beside which flowed the dark, muddy water of the river, he sat down on a mossy stone, put his arm over the boy's shoulder, and began with some embarrassment to tell his story.

"What I am going to tell you is not a fairy tale. It actually happened when I was in India, at the Court of the Viceroy. Did you know that the representative of the King of England is called Viceroy? At the Court of the Viceroy, then, there lived, among other princes and rajahs, a Bengali prince named Lal Sarkar, who had suffered for years from unbearable melancholy, although he was as rich as he was handsome, and as powerful as he was wise. Such melancholy, you know, is as bad for the soul as fever and weakness for the body. Whoever is afflicted in this way loses all the joy of life. This was what had happened to Lal Sarkar, and he was getting worse every day. Neither doctors nor friends could do anything for him. One day a Buddhist priest came to him and told him that if he would travel to Lhassa to see the Dalai Lama, he would be cured. The Dalai Lama is the head priest of the

Buddhists in India and China in the same way as the Holy Father at Rome is the chief of the Christian world. Lal Sarkar did as the priest ordered. He fitted out a caravan and traveled over the lofty Himalaya mountains to the city of Lhassa. He came back two months later, a new man, gay, strong, full of life. The transformation was so miraculous that it caused the greatest astonishment at the Viceroy's Court. I happened to arrive just at this time. But the only thing I could learn about the miracle was that Lal Sarkar had gone to Lhassa. I could not think about anything else, and finally I managed to make friends with Lal and to be invited to his house one evening. The palace, with its fountains and gilded columns and fish ponds and priceless rugs, was really like a fairy tale. I was entirely alone with him, and after we had been talking for a while, I asked him about his journey to Lhassa. All the Europeans in India had been racking their brains and wondering about it, for they had known him to be dragging himself slowly to the grave, sad and hopeless, and now he was a new man, full of vigor and strength. Therefore, I asked him what had happened, and I asked him also if a stranger like myself might know how that came about, and what had been his experience. He said he would be glad to tell me, and that there was nothing he need hide. 'All that happened,' he said, 'was that I saw the Dalai Lama. I looked into his face.' 'Was that everything?' I asked; 'you merely looked into his face?' 'Yes,' he answered; 'only that.' When I sat in silence and surprise, looking perhaps a bit incredulous, he added the following, which I have never forgotten: 'The Dalai Lama is a boy. He is not over twelve years of age. He sits on

his throne and smiles. His face is the most beautiful human face on earth, so beautiful that no one has ever seen anything like it, even in dreams. His brow is like a polished jewel of price, and divine wisdom emanates from it. His eyes pour forth such goodness, that it touches the heart even of the most hardened sinner and makes him fall on his knees. His smile is enough to end all sorrow and pain, and to make all worry vanish. He is a boy, but when you look at him he seems five thousand years old. He is a boy, but when you kiss his hand, you weep. You weep with joy. He is a boy, but he is more powerful than armies and battleships, more unconquerable than the kings and the emperors of the earth. He is love and he is light, and by looking at him, I was cured of my melancholy.' Thus spoke Lal Sarkar to me, a rajah of Bengal."

"What a beautiful story!" exclaimed Wolf in enchantment. "Thou must tell me that story often." In his enthusiasm he used the familiar *thou;* and Erasmus found himself liking this.

Towards evening, Frau von Gravenreuth sought him out and told him that Marietta wished to see him. She was feeling better, but it was scarcely possible that this was more than a temporary rally. Erasmus had previously expressed a wish to speak to her. They determined to keep the interview a secret so far as possible.

When he stood at Marietta's bedside, his first impulse was to regret this satisfaction of his wish. Her face was covered with wrinkles. A single day had destroyed the work of years. Weakness chained her to the bed. Hot moisture had raised spots on her skin.

There was a yellowish light in her eyes. They had unbound her hair, to free her head of its weight, and it lay in copper waves over the white linen, an undying stream of beauty.

To see her thus, shattered and undone, was terrible. But his loss, his mute renunciation, was even worse. Her image vanished from his heart. Everything that had lived between them seemed now to wish never to have been. The memory of years of caresses and tenderness became shameful. The gifts of this body, his precious thefts from it, became sin. Here lay a creature in peril, poor and unadorned; not a wife, not a mistress, a woman who had nothing in common with him, who was no longer part of his life.

He whispered her name. She smiled and lifted her hand feebly.

Frau von Gravenreuth had left the room. Marietta nodded to him, and he sat down on the edge of the bed. She spoke: "Listen to me, Erasmus. We cannot tell what will happen. I am worried by premonitions, and it is better that you know now what you will have to learn later. Have you seen Wolf?" He nodded and grew pale. "Wolf is my child. He is your son."

Eramus stared at her, motionless.

She went on in a weak voice, putting her hand, unnoticed by him, on his. "I have thought often about how you would take it. I do not need to explain why I kept this secret from you. There is some mysterious and sinister chamber in you that has always been horrible to me. Luckily, there was something between us which separated us when we were together, and united us when we were apart. Otherwise, things might have been harder to endure. I needed somebody to bear

witness in your favor. I needed something that would remain alive when you were dead for me. You have died often in my heart, and each time I was forced to sit and hold my heart in my hand and wait for your resurrection."

He went on staring, still motionless and tongue-tied.

Her strength was already failing, but she was able to tell him in the briefest words when the child was conceived, when he was born, where, and how she had managed to keep the secret. She mentioned dates and details to prove her words. She spoke of her happiness, her struggles with herself, her anxiety regarding the child's future. Then she stopped, closed her eyes, and waited for him to speak. He said nothing. He sat motionless, and stared at her. In her voice, her appearance, her personality, was an unquestionable, a sacred truth. He did not shun this truth or doubt it, but he did not want to let it in. The truth stood as with a flaming key before the sinister and mysterious chamber of which Marietta had spoken, and was not admitted.

"The child has turned out well," said Marietta softly. "You will recognize much of yourself in much besides his appearance. I want no solemn promise from you. Everything between us was too unsettled for that. And besides, you have first to make up your mind. I can see how this has upset you. Think it over, Erasmus. Now go; I am tired."

All the rest of the day and evening, his heart was in darkness. He felt fear, qualms of conscience, freezing of the blood, bitter aversion, loneliness, distrust of himself. It harried him relentlessly. He avoided everybody. When Lix spoke to him he lowered his eyes like a criminal. Dr. Schmidthammer reported that

pneumonia had set in. At supper, everybody was quiet. The Countess seemed to have dropped a mask; she looked old and somewhat malicious. Even Aglaia's expression was grave. But Erasmus saw nothing. He was afraid of these beautiful faces. He was afraid of the glance in which he would read a secret mutual understanding; of the glances of disappointment, inquiry, reproach. He regretted the wasted effort, the lost time, the idle words. He was like a seasick person wishing for solid ground under his feet. He longed for decision, security; not for decision by circumstance and obligatory resolve, but for decision from above, irrevocable and incontestable.

He wanted to be alone. As dinner was finishing, he excused himself and walked about for a while on the lower floor. From time to time he stood looking at the English sporting prints that hung on the walls. His attention was nominal; in reality, he was staring into a worried heart. Frau von Gravenreuth came down the stairs, leading Wolf by the hand and speaking to him in an affectionate voice. The boy went on while she lingered for a moment with Erasmus. "He is so excited to-day," she said of Wolf. "He did not want to eat anything. I don't know what to do with him. I promised to take him walking out of doors for a while."

Wolf turned round. There was a smile on his narrow, aristocratic, girlish face that said: "We know each other; we are friends"; but there was also a kind of reticence, a dubious inquiry, in that glance.

This unexpected encounter tortured Erasmus. He could not remember that he had ever experienced any greater torture. The word he had himself pronounced

filled his ears, his brain, the air: All legitimacy exists by the grace of God. It stunned him; it was a flaming club that struck him. If it was true, then no compromise was possible. If untrue, then the world had reached a turning point and was going from bad to worse.

He could not make the child out. What did this boy mean in his life, a stranger come out of strange lands, a creature of passion, unwanted, unknown, unrelated to him? And yet, his eyes, his forehead, his hands, his whole being, were worthy of protection, were a menacing reflection, a reflection and a succession.

Meanwhile, Sebastiane's bulldog had sprung out of his corner towards Wolf. The boy bent down to take him up. The animal, frisking and panting playfully, escaped, sprang at the boy, and sent him into a corner. There was a little shout, followed by the clatter of falling pottery. An Etruscan vase, standing near the door of the music-room, lay in pieces on the floor. The ladies were frightened, and ran in from the dining-room. The culpable dog ran for protection to its mistress. The Countess knelt with anguished face to pick up the precious fragments. Wolf had grown pale. His mouth was twisted, as if he were about to cry; instinctively, he reached for Erasmus's hand. Erasmus, equally instinctive, clasped the boy's hand comfortingly, and the childlike distress that shone in the man's face went deeper than mere concern about the broken vase. But fear and reluctance still mastered him, although he bent down and whispered mechanically consoling words to the boy. Heaviness weighed on them all, and was increased by the embarrassment with which they saw

Sparre come in from out of doors. He had left late in the afternoon and had now come back.

Erasmus escaped. Once in his room, he took up one of the volumes of theological literature which he always carried with him. But he could not concentrate. It grew late, and still he sat with his head in his hands, gray, vague thoughts going through his mind. Finally, seated as he was, he fell asleep. Somebody knocked on his door, but he heard nothing. The knock was repeated. He awoke with a start, and called out, still half asleep.

The sight of Sparre coming in was like a dream.

Eugen Sparre's instant indignation had not lasted very long, despite Sponeck's clumsiness. He had been conscious of Count Ungnad's antipathy, and Erasmus's behavior was less a puzzle to him than to Ferry, particularly since Ferry had felt obliged, by way of excusing his friend, to mention his tender attachment for the patient. What thick skins these people have, Sparre had said to himself; as if the insult was lessened by that!

Ferry had talked nonsense about the inutility of temporary measures. He had not known whose part to take, torn as he was between his affection for Erasmus and the fear and admiration that drew him towards Sparre. Erasmus was in a critical state. Ferry was upset. Was Sparre thinking of a duel? If so, would he be good enough to discuss it with Castellani? At any rate, he, Ferry, was in a terrible fix. Sparre had laughed. No, he had no thought of a duel. He would obtain satisfaction in a manner suitable to himself, as well-bred people always did. He felt as little insulted

as if he had stumbled over the root of a tree in a forest. "I was careless," he said. "I'll take better care next time. That has nothing to do with one's honor." Whereupon Ferry had shaken his head and called him an immensely interesting fellow.

Sparre had seen through the poor actor and made allowances. He was unacquainted with the world into which the storm had driven him, this world that had disrupted his own, and to which he had fled for shelter. He had not been afraid of the storm; but he had grasped at the opportunity of a promised resting place in which to finish a scientific treatise that he was writing. He was more astonished now than at first at all that surrounded him. These people seemed to him like old paintings. Death had passed over them. Of life in his sense they knew nothing. They were covered over with something like golden dust. They were bound in a sumptuous frame, in superannuated venerability. When they spoke, their words were not those of living people; when they jested, their smiles were preconcerted, their laughter sounded as if it came out of the earth. Everything about them was conditioned, shackled, ordained, and prescribed. Even their saddest earnestness was artificial—a shadow theater playing behind a curtain of ice. They had given themselves up to a glittering lie about lordship, and had known for a long time that it was a lie. But they flattered one another out of the notion that it was so. They were like those people who, although they are seriously ill, are easily convinced that they are in good health because they are sad at heart. Such people put an exaggerated quantity of hope and indifference into every breath and gesture; they ask only for illusion. These rooms, these

halls, these ancient and beautiful objects, constituted a mausoleum, cut off from the age, bloodless, strengthless, colorless. The human voice was silenced and was replaced by a humming tone to which they listened anxiously. The demands of others seemed to them iniquity. They still lived in the days of old, holding in their hands reins that had been cut away, smiling in their motionless carriage, whose horses had been led away.

With what composure these attractive women walked towards the precipice, whose phosphorescent glow hid from them its gaping maw. They were dissolving in a yearning which could never be fulfilled, but they had no notion of the impossibility of fulfilment. They still jested behind their masks, still chatted light-heartedly in the idiom of bygone centuries. Let there be no awakening, they seemed to implore, no rude contact with life. Their soft bodies clung to phantoms, their minds reveled in piquant refinements; meanwhile, reality was already shouting to them from behind a wall. They felt themselves to be passing, but not passed; isolated, but not lost.

Eugen Sparre looked on with the eyes of an explorer and a child. The class and the age from which he emerged had trained him to observe. It was his function not to distort what he felt and saw. Everything in and about and behind him was artless. He was unspoiled; his native strength was unimpaired; he had the power to recognize and overcome sorrow. What he had lived through often seemed like poisoned fumes to him. He had withstood every sort of oppression and experienced every sort of humiliation. He had braced himself, made iron wedges of his elbows, in order not to

be crushed to death. He had climbed alone the high, slippery structure of life from which the weak and the overzealous are blown when they are half way up, and go hurtling to break their skulls on the pavement below. He had climbed successfully and won his place. He was unfaltering in his devotion to the task he had elected, or which had elected him; devoted and comprehending as only those can be whose hearts beat in cadence with the pulse of the age. Notwithstanding his youth, he belonged among the prophets of the new age. He had seen what was coming, by the exercise, at the height of the storm, of dispassionate, logical reasoning. He was an observer and a physician. In the midst of the revolution he had remained without revolutionary aspirations; but he trusted these elements, almost loved them, because there seemed to him a higher order in destruction, because everything was necessary and purposeful in life. Everything was a battle of the germs of life against the germs of death—and this everything included the rage for the renovation of the feverish human body, the rejuvenation by agony, the torment and madness of the individual mortal in the universal immortality.

Count Erasmus Ungnad had interested him more than any other of the people at Rienburg. From the first, this high-strung, anguished, haughty, finely chiseled face had struck him. One glance at Erasmus had sufficed to show Sparre himself with absolute clarity. He recognized in the Count his *alter ego*, his contrary self, his opposing pole. And a strange thing had happened: this vision had caused him pain. He was gazing at what seemed a mythological figure, a besieged and solitary figure, a homeless figure strolling

through the darkness as casually as if along a lighted way, weary as one who has borne treasures, living out of season, imprisoned, used up, tragically wandering a downward path to the accompaniment of dying illusions, the doleful knight-errant, the nobleman. There he was, the man ennobled, the remnant, the anachronism; he to whom, as Georg Ulrich said, even God was but a form; who denied and refused to agree that his realm had vanished, and who retained of time nothing but its years, active but empty and meaningless symbols.

This emotion continued to stir in Eugen Sparre. It was too strong to be lessened by the Count's insulting animosity; it gave Sparre so much food for thought that he neglected his work in its favor. Ungnad's personal history, however, did not interest him, although he had pricked up his ears at Ferry Sponeck's allusions. Ferry had not considered himself bound to secrecy; what the whole world knew, Sparre might know. Sparre saw in it merely a confirmation of the character which his imagination had lent Erasmus. Something had been hidden from his sight which was now made plain and completed the picture. These ingenuities were easily deciphered; these hieroglyphics did not even require patience. Consequently, he saw clearly the meaning of the scene upon which he came in the lower hall. One glance at these people standing about the fragments of the broken vase, was sufficient. In sight and memory he saw the girlishly tender boy standing by the excessively slender Erasmus, the man's bowed and worried air, the boy's trembling perturbation, the unmistakable resemblance in the features of man and child, the unutterable link that bound them.

Baroness Polyxene gathered up the fragments after Erasmus had gone, Ferry kneeling to help her. Sparre asked to be shown the bits, saying that with a bit of glue he could probably put them together, for he had done such things often before. The damage, as a matter of fact, was slight: two broken handles, the rim chipped off, and a hole in the body of the vase. They looked at Sparre in astonishment while Ferry nodded and said eagerly: "Yes, he is expert at that. He once glued a Sèvres dish for me. He is a Jack of all trades, you know." Ferry's assiduity created general laughter in which Sparre joined. Nikolas brought forth a pot of glue; Sparre took up the fragments in a cloth and went up to his room.

He was a little mystified by his readiness to do this job. It was something of a joke in the guise of a parable, a message of inscrutable import and indefinite content. He smiled to himself as he joined the broken edges and fitted in the splinters with the dexterity of a skilled workman. He was two hours at this work. When he had finished, he went to the window and stared out. A light was still burning in what he knew to be Erasmus's room. He took up the vase again, assured himself of its firmness, and went out.

Erasmus sprang to his feet. "What are you doing here?" he spluttered. "What does this mean?" He stared at the vase.

Sparre put it on a table. "To-morrow the lines of breakage can be filed down and the damage will hardly be visible," he said.

"But what does this mean?" Erasmus murmured. He stood frowning icily, on the defensive.

"I had the impression that you had taken this little accident to heart," Sparre said. "I scarcely know myself why I undertook to repair it. Perhaps I was trying instinctively to eradicate, in this gesture, something disagreeable that had happened to me, something that perturbed me, but without affecting my equilibrium. Where the blow does not land, there can be no wound. You refused to allow me to minister to a living being, so I became the physician of an inanimate object. The object recovered fairly successfully, as you see."

"I don't understand what you are driving at," said Erasmus. "I have a feeling that you are trying to ridicule me."

Sparre looked downward at the floor. "Strange that you don't understand," he said as if soliloquizing. "Do you find no hint of meaning in the fact that I, the man you hate—or think you ought to hate—the man you hold in horror and aversion, whom you have undeservedly honored by assigning to him a decisive function—do you see nothing significant in my repairing something that was broken for you?"

Erasmus was startled. His face blazed angrily. "Repaired for me? For me? Really, you allow yourself the most improper kind of jests, Dr. Sparre."

Sparre looked up slowly, and spoke in a tone of self-restraint. "I should like to talk with you in another manner than this, Count Ungnad. You are fundamentally mistaken; your suppositions are erroneous. I saw a little pile of fragments on the floor. I saw distress. Was it really the boy's fault that he had played with the dog? He felt it was his fault, and I had the impression that when you took his hand, you

felt that you shared the responsibility of his act. But you dared not answer for him. What is the importance of this antique rubbish, Count Ungnad? If a charwoman were to throw it on a rubbish heap, I should not raise a finger in protest. Likewise, I am ordinarily unconvinced that one should try to glue together a thing that has been shattered. In this instance I determined to ignore my conviction. I thought it might serve to prove something to you. Do you understand me now?"

In reality, Erasmus understood not a word. His face was empty of comprehension and showed only bitterness and awkwardness. His nether lip curled out. He was rubbing the arm of the chair.

"Then I'll make myself clearer," Sparre went on. He was rather depressed. He had looked for more immediate comprehension. "I have just done something which is repugnant to my nature and my inclination. I have tried to do something that I have hitherto refused to do—bridge a spiritual chasm, approach that which lies strictly and unconditionally on the other side of the fence from me. Is that preposterous? I set this vase down on the table as a boundary stone at which we can meet, you standing on your side and I on mine. This moment will never return, can never return. The truth that is in me and is urging me on is a flame that will flare this once only. Perhaps I am undergoing at this moment one of those metamorphoses to which insects are subject. I may be able to hasten an analogous process within you. Do not draw back. To revolt against the courage of the stars is not heroism; there is nothing admirable in anathematizing the unalterable. Do not, when I approach you as far as this vase,

be deaf to my *qui vive*. Sentinels have strict orders, you know. I am not asking comradeship of you. I am grasping at what can be of service to me, to us. There are various kinds of virtue, Count Ungnad, various sorts of courage and cowardice, cruelty and goodness. I and my people can make use of the harvests which you and yours have been storing in your granaries for centuries; harvests of steel hardened by blood, of collective muscle, of sacred doctrine and its worship, of experience refined in successive generations; harvests of the gold of life. The day may not be so far off when we shall both come forward and acknowledge gratefully the truth of this, when we shall have recovered from the initial intoxication and shock of collision. If this does not come about, we shall be as lost on our side as you on yours; a common abyss, unconcerned with the fineness or the coarseness of the grain, will swallow us up together. You should loosen; you are screwed too tightly. You should yield an inch or two. Throw out the fragments, however precious, however cunningly glued together. Old forms must die, and laws and men die too. There is no help against death but life." He stood in silence for a while, examining Erasmus, who did not stir. Then he bowed ceremoniously and left the room.

Erasmus continued motionless. These people have a glib tongue, he thought. His head dropped forward, painfully numb. The numbness waxed greater. He began to pace the room. The floor seemed to split asunder beneath his feet. Once he sighed and listened, for the sigh seemed to come towards him out of the wall. If only one could lighten the burden of defeat, he thought distractedly. And then: I know that she will

die; I know it! Deliver us from evil, he murmured to himself, pressing his handkerchief to his lips; and lead us not into temptation.

Again he listened. The house was silent; nevertheless, distant and ghastly screams rang in his ears. Some one passed through the hall. He opened the door. Darkness. The slumber of the household rolled in a stagnant muddy cloud towards him. He lighted a candle. Sheltering the flame with his hand, he went into the hall. Suddenly he sprang back. In a doorway stood a woman. Her face was covered by her hands. Thus she stood, facing the room where a lamp burned dimly.

It was Helene Gravenreuth. She turned round and dropped her arms listlessly. "She is in a bad way," murmured Frau von Gravenreuth.

Erasmus was silent.

"Come in," she said. "Wolf is asleep in here. The nurse has just relieved me. Be quiet, please, for the child is sleeping very lightly to-night."

He entered, put out the candle, and went over to the boy's bed. He whispered: "Everything is so strange, Baroness, so strange." His cheeks were pale. Suddenly he knelt and prayed.

Frau von Gravenreuth shut the door. When Erasmus rose to his feet, she spoke in a muffled voice: "I was not prepared for it, and I am not prepared now. What is going to happen, Count?"

Erasmus sat by the table with his head in his hand. "You know why I came here," he said.

She nodded. "I know," she replied. "You came to pay court to one of the young countesses. You wanted to marry."

He continued: "It is all changed now. I shall take home not a wife but a son."

"But how are you going to take home your son?" asked Frau von Gravenreuth with pale lips.

Erasmus met her timid glance. "My son will have to come to me sheltered by love and by the law, I think."

A sudden sound made them both start. Wolf was awake. He sat up and looked at them with the dewy radiant eyes with which children emerge from sleep. Frau von Gravenreuth stretched forth her arms as if in entreaty. Erasmus approached the bed.

"Tell me about the Dalai Lama," said the clear, bell-like voice of the boy.

JOST

The Ruler of Heaven thundered a command, and the obedient hosts, like brilliantly plumed swans, fluttered to His eternal throne. The Lord called upon the Archangel Michael and said to him:

I am perplexed about mankind. Never has so much sorrow filled the earth. Lamentations and accusations rise in an endless cloud. I cannot determine whether all these souls are lost souls or not; whether the divine spark which was breathed into them in the beginning is extinct in all of them or not. I have decided to make an experiment. Go down among them, thou sharp-eyed scout; seek out the most hardened among the hardened, the narrowest among the narrow. Remember that the doer of evil is of no consequence; only the indifferent matter. Seek out the insignificant among men, one who has become petrified in idleness and dwells in the enchanted circle of inactivity, whose left hand knoweth not what his right hand doeth. If, on your return, you can say: I have stirred him; I have torn the veil from his eyes and made him to see; then mankind shall once again be granted divine mercy, and the Day of Judgment shall once more be postponed.

The angel lowered his head, and while the mighty trumpets clarioned, he in his great beauty vanished from the exalted regions and went forth to execute the Lord's command.

A group of civil servants, each a person of local consequence in his way, sat about a table in a dimly

lighted tavern. They were alone in the room, with the exception of a wretched looking individual who was huddling, apparently asleep, in a corner by the stove. The men about the table knew him and paid no attention to him, but conversed as freely as if he had not been present. His name was Jost. He was a small tradesman, a sort of middleman, who came at regular intervals to solicit orders from the innkeeper.

At the table, the topic of conversation was the dreariness of everyday life. These men were all touched with irritation, and the fear of life was in most of them. One among them remained silent; not because he was wiser or more content than the rest, but because he was more lackadaisical. He sat in silence while the others contrasted the doleful present with the brilliant past, in the faint reflection of which they strove to rid themselves of their melancholy. The world, horribly disfigured as it now was, had on one occasion been a place of festivity. That occasion had been the war—or at least, the war in its early stages. In those days, even a nobody somehow acquired power, so long as he swam with the general current, and particularly if he had pledged his life in the movement. Power, movement, change: already the words rang as if recorded in the high-sounding annals to be read by future generations. Even those who could not pride themselves on active participation, boasted of martial recollections. What were blood and misery and death? Mere artificial phantoms. The triumphant truth was on the field where honor had been won, where experience had been gained and place obtained.

Postmaster Erbegast, the most eloquent of these zealous visionaries, spoke of the sense of space they

had had during the war. Space to the west, the east, the south; everywhere space, air, opportunity, open country, freedom. Space and opportunity. Night lodgings in castles; journeys into the unknown; new cities, people, things; no boredom between dawn and darkness. If ever the story were told! How wonderful to bring to mind again its expansiveness! He turned eagerly and with a challenging air to councillor Siebold, the silent member of the group, urging agreement. He did not wish to be put off with a mere acquiescent nod. Silent people are never popular when spirits grow animated and talk flows freely. Siebold should be confirming in an emphatic voice everything he said about the marvels they had seen and experienced. Or had the magnificence they had known passed over him without leaving a trace?

Siebold disliked the place he had suddenly assumed as the center of their attention. He was not interested in the past. Yesterday was always a long way behind in his thoughts. Under the questioning glance of the others, memories returned to him, but none took definite shape. He had lost them with the passage of the years. He had never claimed them for his own. Pale colors, shadowy forms, words that died in the distance—how could they continue to affect him? He had become another person. Years had fled. A single year is itself a long period. Besides, he had only spent four months at the front, a hapless little second lieutenant, like so many thousands of others. Thereafter, they had transferred him to a commissary depot, where he had become ill, and whence they had shipped him off to his desk in the finance department, as if the interval

away from it had been a sort of unfortunate vacation period.

Nevertheless, he had the feeling that Erbegast was taunting him; that the others, too, were observing him with ironic glances, as if they looked for nothing extraordinary from him, not even the unsupported boast that he had lived through something remarkable. This vexed him. His pride was threatened, and he braced himself for the attack. He felt the necessity of instilling respect into these mocking skeptics. He explored his memory, and not in vain, for a story rose to the surface. His moody air dropped away. He remembered an occurrence in which he had taken an active part. As he remembered the details only vaguely, at first, a time passed before his story became coherent. But his audience was patient; it allowed him a respite in which to collect the particulars.

What he had to tell was not unusual. Seven people, suspected of espionage, had been brought into a Galician village. They were accused of having signaled to the enemy by lights flashed from a window of the town-hall garret, where they had been found huddled together. Siebold had served as clerk in the affair. Criminal participation could be proved only in connection with one of them, a huge young fellow. There were grave indications that the others had been the victims of malicious informers. Despite this, the captain had sentenced all seven to death, after summary court-martial. Three of them were Jews, there was a seventeen-year-old Polish girl, a twelve-year-old boy, an old man of seventy-six, and their leader, the young giant.

A mere drop in the sea of events, a few more lives

gone the way of millions of others. Meaningless at the time when it occurred, this incident, threadbare with repetition, could not now create any greater stir of interest than that prescribed by courtesy towards the story-teller. Even if some one were to sense the high-handed fashion in which the court-martial was conducted, and express himself timidly about it, the others might legitimately object the necessity of immediate action. The war was not an occasion for the display of sensibility. The civil code and the laws of humanitarianism had no place in a scheme of things which involved the daily defense of one's life. The man who filled his post and fulfilled his duties was automatically free of further responsibility. "The enemy did exactly the same thing," somebody ventured to say. "Whenever they could, they spat in our faces. Even here at home there are people who are not ashamed to make life miserable for men who did their duty and would have been cheered as heroes if luck had been on our side." To this the postmaster assented vigorously, remarking that people are swine and that nothing good was to be expected of a lot of swine.

Following this interruption, Siebold went on with his story, for once having started, he was impatient to conclude. The act of bringing forth words had helped him; it had clarified his memory of picture after picture. He was himself amazed at this automatic reconstruction of his memory and was pleased with himself in the rôle of judge over the fate of others. He lingered over his tale, went into tiny, insignificant details about it, describing with comfortable elaborateness the depression of the countryside, the abandoned village, the poverty of the people, even the rain that

had poured down incessantly. Then he spoke of the young Polish girl, of her black eyes that had glared defiance at them all. For a moment he was unable to remember her name, and then it came to him: Katinka. The name became a thing of magic in his mind, a reality. It helped him to recall the pride and violence with which she had refused to answer questions, even when a gun had been put to her head, even when she had been assured that an answer would preserve the life of the little boy, who was her brother. Time and again, he stressed the girl's obstinacy, ending finally with a lascivious jest which, cheap as it was, brought appreciative laughter. "Do you think anything could have made her speak? Not on your life. She would have parted her legs rather than her lips, I believe."

When sentence had been pronounced, all the prisoners had sunk to their knees, with the exception of Katinka and the young giant. The Jews and the boy had knelt before the captain. The boy had clung to his legs, sobbing woefully until his sister had shouted at him and dragged him away. The old man had kissed the captain's hand continuously and mumbled inarticulate words. But the three Jews had been the most despairing of all. They had protested their innocence in shrill invocations to God, had torn their hair and tugged at their caftans. One of them, a red-bearded fellow, had been particularly humble until the moment when the captain, wearied of their shrieking, ordered that they be led away. Then he had arisen, stretched forth an arm towards the captain, and called down upon him a gruesome Old Testament curse.

A ghastly idyl, framed in smugness, terminated the narrative. Storm and rain in the night. Siebold on

guard duty. Seven corpses, dismal bundles of rags, horrible, flabby, limp and crooked skeletons swaying in the wind, hanging from the branches of seven trees that lined a road.

The postmaster was unaffected by the horror of this tale, not so much because he was calloused, as because, like the rest, his imagination was incapable of grasping its essentials. The same lack of imagination prompted him to ask cynically if Katinka could not, or would not, give useful employment to those legs that had been mentioned. At this moment, the little tradesman or middleman, Jost, awoke in a bustle that disturbed them, came forward to the table, shook himself with a rustling sound, and mumbled something or other they could not understand. He stared at each of them in turn, with eyes like two small glittering brass buttons, two cat's eyes, that rested finally on Siebold's face with so curious and malicious a gleam as to upset the honorable tax collector, and prompt him to stare back with a frown. An awkward pause ensued.

Later in the evening, when Siebold strode home through the little streets blackened by the night, his moodiness had gone and his face was tranquil. He had learned that evening at the tavern that something within him, something hitherto unknown to him, was a thing of value. This realization brought him to the conclusion that an exchange of ideas and conversation with kindred spirits, automatically increases the spiritual resources of a socially and intellectually developed being. A man ought to assert himself, was the moral he drew from this evening's experience; a man ought not hide his light under a bushel. Chance had permitted him to re-establish a broken current, to uncover

neglected treasures within himself. He was comforted by this thought. He saw his existence as something vivid and colorful; his stride became more assured, his expression more alert. He stood still, drew a deep breath, took a cigar from his case, and lighted it.

His destination was not in harmony with his exalted mood: twelve feet square of space, and four beds, including the conjugal bedroom. He had a premonition that it was going to seem stuffy when he got there. He thought of the two children, stirring from time to time in their beds, muttering in dream. There would be clothing and linen on the chairs, and shoes on the floor. The curtains were frayed. Between the windows hung oval frames on the walls, whose plaster had already begun to chip and fall. The ceiling was blackened by the exhalation of the sleepers. His wife was certainly awake, sitting up for him with stiffly braided pigtails, pale, peevish, listless. She would ask where he had been, why he was so late, and would pester him with her household worries—there were no vegetables to be had, or the grocer was out of sugar, or they had no coal, or wood, or bread, or flour in the house. His older daughter had complained of a sore throat; she was probably feverish by now. All this seemed to him an offense against his dignity. He was an official, with certain powers. The disparity between his public position and his private situation was a source of unending conflict. As a tax officer, he enjoyed honors. It was a fact that people trembled before him; their well-being and their misery were in his hands. As a husband and a father, he was condemned to insignificance, forced to be merely one of the mob.

He dismissed the thought. He longed for animation.

He had met a girl, not long since, in this same street, and had gone home with her. Notwithstanding her base practice which, as a man of spotless reputation and an official, he was bound to despise, she had appealed to him. In the course of a man's life he has secret experiences which become a source of danger only when they cease to be secret, which is to say, when a man is careless, leaves traces, does not respect the partitions that separate the several compartments of life. Her name was Sabine Jaeger. He was attracted by her hair, which was as yellow as new sawn timber. She was high-spirited, and still relatively unspoiled. When she had said something about their meeting again, he had fallen in with the notion. With a kind of self-deluding absent-mindedness, he turned towards the house where she lived.

Somebody hailed him. He turned with a feeling of guilt, and recognized Jost, who had been walking behind him.

Jost was wearing a little yellow coat which came scarcely to his hips. He had folded his arms in the wide sleeves, and carried them as in a muff. He had trotted hastily past Siebold, recognized him, hesitated until the other man had come abreast of him, and then said in a thin, high-pitched squeak that he was glad to meet the councillor again; he had not known that the councillor lived in this neighborhood.

Siebold murmured a few words in a tone of mingled condescension and ill-humor, and Jost started on alone. Again he trotted forward, and again he stopped. "It is a long way," he sighed. He pulled his hands out of the sleeves and grabbed his flat, ridiculous, melon-

shaped hat, which a sudden gust of wind threatened to carry off. "A man's feet get sore, walking this way day after day. The kind of life I lead was certainly not prophesied for me at my cradle. May I walk along with you, councillor? As far as the corner. My alley is a little farther on, behind the Atlantic Bar. Nice place, the Atlantic Bar, isn't it? Nice people. Music all the time. If a man could only be gay, for once."

Siebold did not know exactly what to do. That this slovenly waif should speak to him offended his official dignity. He hardly knew the fellow. On the other hand, things had come to such a pass in the world, that one could no longer give vent to reasonable arrogance. He stifled the impulse and straightened up, stiff and reserved, while Jost walked beside him with submissive affability.

The shrill voice, breathless because of the gait at which they were walking, rose again: "I know a man there, the doorman. He is an old fellow. Two years ago he had a shipping business of his own and a villa with a rose garden. And now he whistles carriages, probably for people who used to bow and scrape before him." An asthmatic cough interrupted his speech. "A man gets scared, councillor," he squeaked; "scared. Fate is like a wolf. It sneaks down malignantly and jumps on a man's back. I've got three children to look after. The oldest is eight. A girl, a good child; a heart of gold. Name's Eveline. Poetic name, don't you think? Well, that's the only luxury the poor can afford. But when I call her by her name, Eveline, I feel better right off. She peddles shoelaces in the streets. The laces are cheap and worthless; made out of paper. Last week I came home towards evening and

found the five-year-old hanging from the top floor railing, right out into the air, kicking and yelling. Ten seconds more and the little muscles would have been pretty weak. What do you think of that? Of course, the poor kids are left to themselves. Their mother is dead. Sometimes the upholsterer's daughter next door looks after them. But we can't count on that much longer. She's fourteen, but she's already going to have a baby. Her father's a drunkard, her brother's in prison, and there isn't a bit of bread or a rag of clothing in the house—and yet that girl's blood can boil. You walk up the stairs and fall over weak-boned children. You see emaciated men and women standing in doorways, with misery above, misery below, and misery all about them. Don't you think I'm right to get scared some of the time?"

Siebold cleared his throat. "Living is hard these days," he agreed reluctantly. He was impatient to get rid of this talkative simpleton whose society he abhorred.

But the little man went on in his whining voice. "Life is like a dark cellar," he said. "When I look at the people I meet I get a queer feeling. They talk and talk and talk. Business. And what sort of business! If you see two of them whispering together you may be sure a third is going to have his throat cut. I go to see them in their homes, and they are all alike. Upper class and the rest—you see the same dirt and swill everywhere. On tables and chairs, in cupboards and beds—swill and dirt everywhere. You'd think some star overhead, cursed by God, had poured all its dirt and swill over us in one night. And you can't wash it away with water or with fire. It's the

kind that will stick through all eternity. 'Well,' I say to myself, 'ready? What's up? What are you thinking about? What are you making faces for? What are you grinning and laughing about, having your carriages called by an old man who used to grow roses in his own garden, while the whole of life is nothing but a dark cellar? Hey, there! What are you doing there, throwing all your sorrows and troubles in a heap so that we walk into it and fall down and are suffocated by it?' And then when my anger is gone, I want to fall down and cry, do nothing but bawl from morning till night. Imagine that child, fourteen years old and pregnant already! Just a child! Holy God above! I can't stand it. I can't sleep at night for thinking of it. I lie awake for hours, and suddenly I can see the road to Golgotha, the great, sorrowful road to Golgotha."

Siebold stood still. He flung away his cigar and asked severely: "What are you telling me all this for? You are raving, my good man."

This rude reproof shamed the little man. "You're right, councillor. It's pure nonsense," he answered timidly. "I'm weak-minded, that's all. Many people say that about me. It makes me suffer more than anything else does. I even have obsessions. For instance, you won't believe it, but to-night I counted the number of words you used to tell your story. Isn't that mad? Eight hundred eighty-nine words all told, carefully counted. I pretended to be asleep and was counting all the while. I listen, I understand what is being said, and all the while my brain is working like an adding-machine, going click, click, click. I can't help myself; I have to count. Eight hundred eighty-nine words. A full newspaper article. It was thrill-

ing, councillor. I congratulate you; really, a thrilling story. But at night, when I lie and stare into the darkness, all those words will march past my bed and stand in rows, like tin soldiers. Only then do I really understand the meaning of the words. Then everything grows clear, and I see the road to Golgotha, as I said before. I'm in a bad state. It's no joke, you know, being dragged over the road to Golgotha night after night. I ought to see a doctor. I ought to have myself examined one of these days."

Siebold was seized by a cold shudder. The chatter and gestures of this ragged individual had gradually begun to affect him. He was sure the man was crazy, and he made up his mind to leave him without further ado. A mumbled word, and he disappeared.

A happy constitution made it possible for him to forget quickly. When a man is a government official by choice and training, his daily duties serve as a barrier against the world. His petty powers exalt him.

People had to wait until he deigned to receive them and hear their story. Even when he was unoccupied, and was pleased to sit in moody, listless idleness, they still were forced to wait. This power to make people wait is the sum and substance of the power of petty officialdom. People froze in the halls while his office stove was red with heat. Documents of unquestioned importance piled up, ignored. To the trained eye they revealed economic weakness, silly exertions, illegal subterfuges, criminal misrepresentation. They taught one to open one's eyes to the hidden follies of existence. They were a means by which the negligent were summoned to appear and stand like trapped thieves before

the officials. Rebellion was useless, for the document was there to confront them. The document spoke. The document broke them.

From time to time, however, a squeaky voice penetrated out of the forgotten past. In imagination, the little yellow coat and the muffled hands swam before the councillor's eyes. Two or three times a day this apparition would rise and Siebold would shake his head. He was not used to seeing things that were not actually present, or to hearing the voice of an invisible speaker. It was a nuisance, though not one to be taken seriously. Just the same, he remained away from the tavern. He thought it advisable to avoid another encounter with the obtrusive chatterer. There were other places of refuge, in particular, the arms of Sabine Jaeger, with whom he was spending many intimate evenings.

One day a letter came in the post, no more than a single sheet on which was written one sentence: "The road to Golgotha is long." He stared at it, seemed to be deliberating about it, then tore it into bits and flung it into the stove. Such insolence! The fellow ought to be locked up.

Two days later his wife handed him an open postcard. What is it all about, she wanted to know. He read: "Tin soldiers draw up every night on parade."

He forced a laugh. His wife questioned him insistently, suspecting an intrigue, a message in code. He reddened angrily and answered that he knew the writer, who was a harmless madman playing a stupid joke. He would stop the fool.

That same afternoon, on his way home from his office, he saw Jost, in his yellow coat, standing before a dram-shop. Jost took off his comical hat and greeted

him most obsequiously. Siebold looked straight ahead without returning his greeting. But he observed that Jost was following him. As the sound of the fellow's trotting steps came nearer, he grew nervous and ashamed of his nervousness. Suddenly he stopped.

"Bad weather, councillor," Jost said dejectedly. "With weather like this in November, how are we going to get through the winter? I've already pawned everything movable."

"I advise you to pack yourself off, for if you don't I'll have you arrested on the spot," said Siebold in a rage. "And for God's sake, spare me your miserable confidences!"

But when he looked at the little man he grew pale. Jost had focused his eyes on him, those two brass buttons that gleamed behind quivering eyelids. There was something in those eyes he had never observed in any other human being: an incomprehensible, almost frantic torment, combined with an equally incomprehensible and frantic malice. Perhaps it only seemed like malice to him; at any rate, he was surprised at the shudder of fear that ran through him. He went on ponderously, amazed, hemmed in by the fog and by a secret perturbation that seemed to drag behind him and rattle like a chain.

Things went so far that he was unable to step out of doors without seeing that yellow coat at least once every day. It is true that Jost never spoke to him again. But to brace himself to meet this man, among thousands of people, in a large city, gradually upset his equilibrium.

Shabby and slovenly, trotting along like a mummy with his hands in his sleeves, shriveled, hurrying along

wrapped in thought and with a worried air, Jost would turn up unexpectedly at a street corner, beside a row of trees, in the middle of a road. Once Siebold saw him staring into a shop window, his melon-shaped hat pulled low over his eyes and a silly look in his face; another time, he was squatting on a curbstone before a gateway. He would walk on the other side of the street from Siebold, in the same direction, cross the street and vanish. Occasionally, he would rush directly towards the councillor, and veer aside at the very last moment. Always, he carried his head forward and his eyes lowered, like a man alarmed, hunted, and desiring to be unobserved; and always there was about him that strange air of frantic torment combined with malice.

Siebold's home was at the back of a plot on which stood two houses. One morning, as he was crossing the garden, he saw Jost at the second story hall window of the front house. The window was open, and the man was leaning out with both elbows on the sill and his head in his hands. This time the hat was on the back of his head, leaving visible the carefully parted, greasy, gray hair. He was motionless, staring into the sky. Siebold boiled with wrath. He called the janitor, and, too enraged for speech, pointed with his umbrella at the man in the window. Finally, he succeeded in asking what that person was doing up there. The janitor went upstairs, and he waited below still trembling with anger. Soon Jost slipped past him, followed by the swearing janitor. He was downcast, silent, trotting hurriedly on. Siebold ran after him, came up to a policeman in the street, gave his name and rank, and pointed again to the disappearing yellow coat. He

told the policeman to keep an eye on that tramp, adding that the fellow was probably a sneak thief. He had been observing him for some time, and had reason to consider him a public menace. The policeman, astonished at his foaming rage, promised to arrest the suspect if he showed himself again in the vicinity.

Siebold thought with relief that he might now feel assured of peace. Yet there remained an ominous perplexity, a certain absent-mindedness and irritability, which he could not overcome. But as the man did not appear in the next few days, he began to breathe freely again. However, on the third or fourth day thereafter he found a large sheet of paper lying on his office desk. A red cross had been drawn in each corner, three crosses had been made in the center of the sheet, and underneath, written also in red pencil, was the following:

The bloody guide-posts are marked on the map,
And what they point to is sorrow and shame,
And he who erected and put them there,
Towards him the whole spirit world now points.

At first he couldn't imagine what this was all about. Poetry: what did it mean? He thought it was a joke played by his fellow civil servants; he frowned, took up the sheet, and studied the handwriting. Then he grew pale. His hands seemed suddenly lame, and his head was afire. He jumped up, shouted at the clerk to inquire who had put this thing on his desk, and lost his temper entirely when the clerk swore he knew nothing about it. He called in the messenger hoarsely, pointed at the sheet of paper, and threatened to institute an

official inquiry. Amazed at this scene, other men ran in from neighboring offices. He tried to explain to them what had happened, to tell them about the offense that had been committed. Suddenly he began to stutter. He stopped speaking, wiped the sweat from his forehead, went back to his chair, and sank into a mood of gloomy meditation. The others shrugged their shoulders, looked at one another significantly, and left.

His somber mood had unfortunate consequences for those who were forced to deal with him. These simple folk waited hours in vain to be called into his office. People in a hurry had to stand about until their feet were sore. Those with a guilty conscience were in despair. The persons who were admitted had to submit to a knifelike inquisition. Anything that looked like misrepresentation encountered biting sarcasm. Orders for fines were made out by the score. The halls resounded with protest. But the almighty tax collector sat and delivered his decrees. He sat and barricaded himself against the voice, the solitary voice. He sought to make himself blind to that face, that solitary face. He tried to escape the sound of the doggerel he had found on his desk. He knew what that voice wanted, while he shouted at a tubercular woman that since she could not pay her taxes she would be dispossessed. He grew more and more angry. He would show them what it meant not to yield, not to relent! When he reached home he was exhausted.

Towards twilight on the following Sunday, he stretched out on a couch and fell asleep. His wife sat sewing at a window. The two children were looking at a ragged picture book in a corner of the room. Suddenly a ghastly shriek broke into the silence. Sie-

bold sprang to his feet, white-faced with terror, looking as if he had been ripped into strips by terror. His wife sprang at him, shook him, and cried out, "What is it? What has happened?" Her scrawny body, gradually undermined from within, was scarcely equal to the weight of these fears. The children stood trembling behind her, gazing with wide eyes at their father.

The man was not himself. It was not he who had cried out, but some one within him; more precisely, ten men within him. They had run past him, shrieking, in a ring of purple flame. They had assembled within him to utter this cry, to waken him. This was all he knew to be a fact, but even this he could not tell. It would have been debasing. Nothing like this had ever happened to him before. It ran counter to his official situation and his convictions that such things should occur. He repulsed his wife roughly, pulled himself together, dashed cold water over his face, put on a coat, and went out.

He had agreed to meet Sabine Jaeger, but first he went to his old haunt, to the tavern, for supper. Something impelled him to go there, for there he might meet the yellow coat. He had to go there in order to save himself from the accusation of cowardice. And a decision might intervene; who could tell? He might be able to pin the scoundrel down, draw facts from him. Or he might tell his friends what this fellow had been doing to him, and get advice from them. He determined in advance upon the abusive and indignant tone in which he would describe the presumption and lunacy of the fellow; but when he sat at table among his well-intentioned friends, he could not utter a word. He could only sit and think about it, and his heart began to beat

more quickly. He could not find the necessary preamble. The spirit of the thing, its malice, the indignation he ought now to be feeling—all this had vanished and had given way to something vague, childish, stupid, inarticulate. He was told that he did not look well, that his cheeks were hollow and his eyes dull. He acknowledged that he was feeling out of sorts. This would serve as an excuse to get away early. When he had gone, the postmaster raised his eyebrows significantly and ventured the opinion that that man was going down hill; he wouldn't last much longer.

Siebold hurried through the streets. The alleys seemed to him abysses, the locked gates and windows seemed bolted for eternity. The filched, agreeable horror with which a reputable married government official goes to a prostitute, veiled temporarily that other horror, which had meanwhile receded into the innermost cells of his being. The Jaeger woman lived in an extremely old suburban house, with many courtyards and corridors and many creaking stairs and cold stone landings. She had two rooms on the ground floor in the last courtyard. Little coverlets and cushions, gayly upholstered furniture, and a dimly lighted lamp made up for the poverty of the rooms themselves.

The girl received him in a green wrapper and seemed glad of his coming. Their conversation leapt from one interval of silence to another, vapid, stiff, strained. Outside, the rain was splashing. Siebold felt himself to be relatively secure. Such disquiet as remained would vanish in the satisfaction of his passion. He was chary of speech and full of desire. But scarcely had they moved towards the welcoming couch when he stared with frozen eyes at the wall, and pointed a numb

finger. There, fixed in the wall with two thumb tacks, was a bit of cardboard with a yellow butterfly painted at each side, and between them a red flame under which, in the finished lettering of medieval manuscripts, he read:

> The bloody guide-posts are marked on the map,
> And what they point to is sorrow and shame,
> And he who erected and put them there,
> Towards him the whole spirit world now points.
> He builds anew both night and day,
> Heedless of the goal and of the way.

"Where did you get that?" he asked. His lips had all but lost their power to speak, and his chin trembled. "Where did you get it?" His appearance frightened her, but she strove to answer his question. "Somebody made me a present of it." He caught her by the arm and gripped her so fiercely that she cried out with pain. "Who? Who gave it you? Tell me who it was?"

At that moment a moaning cry arose in the courtyard, not a particularly loud cry, but a penetrating one. "Oh, Golgotha!" it called again and again, drawing out the word: "Oh, Golgotha!" How well he knew that voice! He sprang up, fumbled for his clothes, and fell exhausted into a chair. With his trousers pulled half way up his legs, he muttered breathlessly: "He has traced me here. That means the end of me. I must catch him. I must strangle him." He dressed in troubled haste. Sabine, concerned for him, listened attentively. The moaning "Oh, Golgotha!" was still to be heard, but more faintly, coming from a greater dis-

tance. As he fastened his collar and adjusted his tie, he spoke distractedly: "Don't know what he wants. Always after me, early and late. Always after me. Don't know what he wants. Never did anything bad in my life. On my trail, like a detective. I can't tolerate it. A person like that should be locked up. He belongs in an insane asylum."

Sabine looked at him, timid and worried. She was glad he was going. As soon as he was ready, she unlocked the door, and when he bolted out without saying good-bye, she made the sign of the cross.

The courtyard was in darkness. The calling had ceased. He looked round. Nobody seemed to be there. He stood still, and then walked on with head bent forward, trying to pierce the rainy darkness with his eyes.

He sought his mysterious pursuer. Fiery violet rings appeared again before his eyes. He staggered out towards the gateway, knocked at a window, and an old woman came forward to unlock the gate. "Didn't somebody come through here a moment ago?" he asked. "A little fellow with a yellow coat?" Nobody had gone out; she had not seen anybody.

He took a few steps in the street and looked about for a place to rest. He propped himself against a wall. His head was whirling. Beneath his feet the earth bent and yielded like India-rubber. What was up? What was happening to him? "I have never done anything wrong in my whole life," he muttered gloomily to himself. "My hands are clean. Nobody can accuse me of anything. I've never done anything illegal; I've never been hard on anybody. I've always been industrious, punctilious, thorough, sober, decent.

What does the scoundrel want of me with his Golgotha and his idiotic verses?"

Suddenly, as if his tongue were moving in one direction and his thoughts in another, he was horrified to hear himself declaiming in a monotonous, schoolboy sing-song:

> The bloody guide-posts are marked on the map,
> And what they point to is sorrow and shame,
> And he who erected and put them there,
> Towards him the whole spirit world now points.

The meaning! what was the meaning of all this? There must be some sort of meaning in it! And the rest of it:

> He builds anew both night and day,
> Heedless of the goal and of the way.

What about it? How did this thing happen? Why did it happen? Did it have anything to do with that tubercular woman? Strange, that he should think of her. He did not know what to make of it. He moved slowly on in the rain, his umbrella unopened. He was neither musing nor alert; he was listening, incessantly listening. Listening to the riddle. What had happened to him was a riddle. A moment ago he had been searching for his pursuer in the courtyard; now he was seeking the solution of the riddle, or its nature, if not its solution. He felt that he was dragging something along and could not understand why it was so heavy, why he had been burdened with it, or even what it was. "I have a wife and children. I must pull myself together," he said aloud. The sound of his voice, and

perhaps also the stream of glaring light into which he found himself walking, seemed to buck him up. He had reached the Atlantic Bar. A long queue of motor cars and carriages stood beside the curb; from within came the sound of music and laughter. He scarcely dared look towards the bar, and quickened his pace. In a few minutes he came upon a throng of people, shouting and gesticulating in groups around a smartly turned out cab. The coachman had doubtless been dragged down from his box, for the two horses stood by unattended. They looked somehow as if they had been brought to an abrupt standstill while running at a fast gait. The coachman's yell rose above the rumble of the multitude of voices. Siebold gathered from the conversation of two boys who stood in front of him what had occurred.

At this point in the street there was a municipal potato market, which was of course locked during the night. However, many poor people had already gathered there to wait for the opening at dawn—women, old men, and half-grown children. They had been squatting and lying on the ground, with blankets, capes, and petticoats over their heads to protect them from the rain and the chill of the night. Of a sudden, this open cab, bearing a young fop of nineteen or twenty, had come speeding along. The boy looked dissipated. His fingers were covered with rings, there was a diamond pin in his scarf, his trousers were carefully creased, he was wearing patent leather shoes and kid gloves, and he carried a stick. He had the whole world in his pocket, and despised it. In the darkness, the coachman had not seen the crowd squatting and sleeping in the road, and had cried out too late.

Shrieks of terror answered his cry. Men and women had scattered; the coachman had driven alongside the curb, and a child had been caught in the back wheel of the carriage. It was still lying, unconscious, on the ground.

To Siebold, this seemed a fortunate occasion to escape from his torments. He did not know that he was rushing straight into it. He plunged into the crowd and reached the open space about the coachman, the passenger, and the victim. The child's face was bluish white. Beside it knelt Jost, and it wanted no particular shrewdness to divine that he was its father. He seemed to be talking, but his words were drowned in the tumult. From time to time he would wipe away the blood that trickled out of the little girl's mouth, and stroke her cheek and forehead. He paid no attention to the questions and counsel of the crowd but continued to remain wrapped in his grief.

Something was said about moving the girl to a hospital. A voice objected that all the hospitals were overcrowded. A woman said that the municipal first-aid service had been called on, but could not send an ambulance before an hour or so. At this the crowd muttered angrily. A man who turned out to be a doctor stepped into the circle. He knelt down, put his ear to the child's heart, and said a few words to Jost. By this time a policeman had come up to intervene between the noisy coachman and the heated mob, which was glaring angrily at the bewildered and stupefied young fop. He was pale and tired, striving to conceal his fear of the excited crowd under an air of hauteur and unconcern. Pulling at his little mustache, he stood in

what he thought was a posture of aristocratic disdain, which emphasized his preposterously vapid pose.

"God will not allow it," they heard Jost say; or, rather, it was Siebold who heard him, for he had been driven against his will to approach the little man closely. "Blood goes on pouring out of my soul," he said as if in a trance. "God will not do this to me. I ought to count all the drops of blood, so that I may be sure they are all poured in again. I want them all back. The soul needs blood. Where is the little basket? My Eveline had a little basket. Where is the little basket?"

The men and women stared down at him curiously and pityingly. Their sleepless faces, scarred by misery, were full of compassion. They were filled with a somber experience of life's ills, with hard-learned patience, with the rust of misery. Somebody brought forth the ragged little straw basket, with its blue ribbon. Meanwhile, the child had stirred, and Jost was saying that he wanted to carry it home. He wanted to go home to his other children; he would carry Eveline in his arms. The same force that had impelled Siebold to approach Jost now obliged him to offer to help the little man, despite the evil and obstinate reluctance that arose in his mind. There was a flicker of hope in his breast that this gesture might constitute a sort of compensation. He wanted to be able to say: my dear fellow, here I am. You can see now that you have wronged me, and that you ought to leave me in peace hereafter. There was some mistake, as you can see, some misunderstanding.

He bent down and put his hand on the child's head. It was cold. It seemed to belong to a being in another

world. Jost looked into his face and appeared to find it natural that he should be there. The grooves in his cheeks looked like the scars left by knives. His eyelids seemed glued together. His hands were covered with mud, and his coat, trousers, shoes, and even his hat, once more on the back of his head as on that day when he had sat in the window, were spattered. He lifted the child with more strength than one would have expected to be in him, and the girl put her arms about his neck. Siebold, who had so lately avoided this man as if he had been the pest, stood by his side, bound to him by an invisible chain. A boy ran after them, fluttering some bank notes. The fop had decided, at the last minute, upon an act of charity. Jost shook his head. Siebold said, taking the notes and putting them in his pocket, that he would accompany Jost and turn over the money when they had reached his home. "The little basket," Jost called out. A woman went back to fetch it, and Siebold took it from her. Jost was about to move off when the policeman detained him long enough to record his name and address.

Gradually the curious and the sensation seekers dispersed, and Siebold found himself alone with Jost and his tragic burden. He was dumbly astonished at all his actions. It was as if a second being had stepped out of his person and there were two of him. His double was forsaken. Each step he took lowered him by one more degree. In the sickly silence, he spoke to his companion: See what I am prepared to do. See how I am lowering myself. Then came the feeling that he had been mastered more by the desire to solve the riddle than anything else; subjugated by the black, poisonous, consuming, burning impatience to know the

reason for the immeasurable violence and injury and audacity with which the barriers of his personality had been destroyed, the sanctuary of his dignity violated, his peace of mind shattered. All this had been done to him—a man of responsibility, a bureaucrat possessed of powers which raised him above the common herd and were a safeguard against anarchy! Even more stubborn, however, was the rebellion in the soul of the double from whom he had cut himself asunder and who had been left behind.

It was now raining harder than before. He opened his umbrella and held it over Jost and the child. The weak little man was staggering and panting under a burden grown too heavy for him. Siebold looked around, as if he expected some one to come to Jost's aid. He tried to repulse the thought that he might take the girl, and indeed would finally have to take her. There was no way out of it. Jost's trembling need was too patent. He took up the child. Her damp, oily hair brushed his face; her head fell forward on his shoulder as if her neck were broken; her little arms hung down, stiff and scrawny. Siebold was a strong man, and the child was as light as a feather in his arms. He handed the umbrella and basket to Jost, and they went on their way. Suddenly Jost shouted into the night: "God should not allow it!" in a tone of martyrdom and protest.

He is beginning to rave again, said Siebold to himself. The child stirred in his arms. He felt her legs, her narrow chest, her skinny thighs clinging to his body, and it was all so new to him that he shuddered. None of his own children had ever been so close to him, either in illness or in tenderness; none had ever

been pressed against him so like an elf, in such abandonment. His throat was raw. He had swum so far out of his own ken, that he walked in a sort of enchantment through an open gate, blindly following Jost up endless stairs, higher and higher, past doors and then still higher, as if they were climbing a tower. They went finally into a musty room where Jost lit a stump of candle, and Siebold looked around.

Two children were asleep on a pallet. Beside it stood a bed covered only with a straw mattress and a blanket. There were no curtains at the windows, through which one could see factory chimneys rising like huge fingers, and lightning conductors like black rays against the sky. Pictures cut out of magazines, displaying mountains, castles, generals, and kings, were pinned on the cold gray walls. There was a broken trumpet lying on the floor, and on the table Siebold saw a crust of bread, a gnawed beet, and a lotto box.

How did I get here? he wondered. And how am I going to get away? Jost had taken the child from him and undressed it quietly, out of consideration for the two children who were asleep. He said in a whisper: "That doctor promised to send the district dispensary doctor in the morning. If only he doesn't forget! Meanwhile, I ought to be putting cold poultices on her. Of course, of course. I'll do it, you poor, runaway little soul. And wash away the blood and the dirt. I'll do it; I'll do it."

He whispered the words breathlessly, beside himself with anxiety. Meanwhile he was doing what he could, tossing aside the little dress, the shoes and stockings, petticoat, and shift. He brought forth a jug of water

and jerked a cloth, black with use, from a nail on the wall, trotting meanwhile to and fro before Siebold, who had put the bank notes on the table and was standing helplessly about. One wall of the room was evidently of thin plaster, for it let in a continuous sound of painful groaning from the next room, to which Siebold listened in fear and agitation. Jost wrapped the child's body tenderly in a woolen blanket, after which he placed the wet cloth over her forehead. Then he knelt with folded hands beside the bed.

At the sight of the child's naked body, the thought of a fish leapt into Siebold's mind and filled him with a strange, freezing, supplicating delight. The image of a white, convulsive fish, its eyes pleading in the death throes for its native element, seemed suddenly to have some connection with the flaring up of a light in a pit. He listened to the groaning that went on behind the wall and grew louder as the pain increased.

"It's only a trifle. A little soul needs but little space in this big world. When were you ever in anybody's way? Whom did you ever deprive of air and food and drink? Who ever noticed you? Who ever lost his share when your graceful little feet moved in the crowd? They can shove you into a corner: that is their privilege. They can say to you: Get away! Out of my sight! They are allowed to talk that way. But your life; that is something else. It is a life, just as theirs is. Your blood is blood, just as theirs is. They give you nothing; you take nothing from them. All you ask is to go on living, simply to go on living."

Siebold was trying to get away, but the man's speech and manner rendered him irresolute. There was something here that one had to take notice of. And he was

stopped, too, by the terrible groaning that came from beyond the wall. He sank feebly into a chair beside the table. All about him he felt a congested, feverish activity in which he was taking part with a remote and hitherto unsuspected portion of his being.

"You seize a thing and call it by name," Jost went on. "The things you can't put a name to, and can't grasp, trickle through your fingers. The most precious thing in the world trickles away drop by drop. Probably it took a hundred thousand years to create it. Great-great-great-grandfathers have transmitted great-great-great-grandchildren drop by drop, fiber by fiber; they have worked and built, plowed and harvested, suffered and produced, one after the other, on the spear-side and on the distaff-side, for a hundred generations, to create the spark that glows in the breast. Suddenly, something rolls along, a wheel comes rolling by, because a young fop with a monocle in his eye is avid for girls and drinking bouts, and the little breast is crushed in, the little heart is broken, the spark is extinguished. Can such things be? Are such things permitted? Tolerated?"

A shriek pierced the room and Jost nodded. "There you are. Two inches of wall between somebody here trying to enter into death, and somebody there trying to enter into life. And men cannot grasp it. Nobody can grasp either the one or the other. A fourteen-year-old girl suffering the pangs of birth, and an eight-year-old girl ready to return into the womb of mother earth. Do you hear? Do you hear?"

He turned towards Siebold, addressing him for the first time. Both listened. A woman was lying in travail. Her groaning, the intense, strangled, raving

shriek from the rack of torture, was unmistakable. The two sleeping children stirred restlessly. Jost went over and calmed them.

He was in a state of giddy, pitiful activity. He ran back and forth, closing drawers, touching various objects in the room, but as the groaning arose again he stood still and said: "Do you hear that? Do you grasp what we are doing? Do you realize how much suffering there is continually on earth? How much we are made to suffer by unrelenting nature, and even more by man? How much dreams and demons make us suffer? How much the flesh and the spirit make us suffer? We stand drinking at a bar, aud people suffer. We draft documents, and people suffer. We satisfy our needs and gratify our lechery, and people, meanwhile, are suffering. Everywhere in the world, above and below, among masters and among servants, in darkness and in light, everywhere there is suffering. Do you realize what all of us are doing? What the lot of us is worth? Do you really grasp that?"

His eyes were wide open and filled with a kind of phosphorescent light. As he spoke, his teeth chattered and his lips hung loose and flaccid. He had shoved his fists deep into the pockets of his soiled and bloody coat. "And when it does happen, when the wheel does crush the living heart, why does not the fop kneel down and lick up the blood from the pavement? Is it to dry there? to evaporate into the hereafter? Why does he not come forward and call out: 'I! I! I! . . .' And when that child in the next room is about to become a mother, to know misery in her childhood, why does not the scoundrel come forward who made her pregnant? Why does not that beast come and sink down in terror

and fear and pity at the writhing and the groaning of the poor little thing? Why does he not come to accuse himself? Why do they say no word: 'Forgive us, we knew not what we did.' What sort of world is this in which they are allowed to sneak away and act as if they knew nothing about it? Oh, what people, what people! They know not what they do; that's what it is. Therefore, they shall not be forgiven. No, and again no! Never forgiven. Come, you fop, and press your vicious lips to the stones. Come, you beast; listen and see. The man who acts ought to know the meaning of his action. It is all a matter of knowing. Oh, no! You are not going to shake off your responsibility. You are not going to seek a subterfuge in laws and regulations. You may be blind, you dog, you louse, you nonentity, but you have got to know, know, what you have done, and sink down and join in the groaning and wailing that echoes to the ends of the world. I! I! I!"

The candle-light flickered dully. Around the table, everything was in darkness. The factory chimneys towered more and more sternly into the sky. The silence was so intense that every nerve in the body quivered. A quick, interminable alertness was in the ear and the brain.

Councillor So-and-so of the Tax Division had disappeared. In his place sat a nameless individual, a man whose coat of iron was beginning to melt away. This was no longer the high-perched hovel of an outcast; there was no longer a table dimly lighted by a gutting candle. There was a room open under the stars. Time had ceased to flow. The earth had disappeared.

And as the nameless man saw himself lifted out of the coherence of things, hands from below touched him. The hands of those who had gone, who had been executed. They reached towards him yearningly: a boy's hands; an old man's hands; a girl's hands; the hands of men. Some were folded, others ready for defense; some were supplicant, others menacing; some were affirming, others wringing sorrowfully.

At first, the man thus afflicted asked what they wanted of him; but their mute speech gained in clarity with the clarity of their contour, and as from shadowy mist they were transmuted into matter, their demands became as clear, their clamor, reproaches, and cries for justice as unmistakable as the sound and intonation of spoken words. Were they grieving for the things they had been forced to leave behind? Did they seek to pay a debt which had remained unpaid? Or bestow a caress they had hitherto denied? Were they making promises? Begging gifts? Swearing oaths? Pointing to a road? Seeking a friend? Writing, digging, resting, hurrying? All of these, and much more. Hands are creatures in whom all existence is reflected.

The couples multiplied; new pairs of people emerged to join the others. He had already seen them, and yet not seen them in the course of his days. They had spoken to him, but he had refused to listen. They were the hunted and the burdened among men. The multitude of faces stirred confusedly. Some were hard, withered, yellow; others innocent, with delicate limbs. Some had thick veins and swelling muscles; others stood timid and trembling. Some were sick and weary; others full of energy and determination. They were

calloused, pale, rosy, bowed, flat, hairy, sleek, little, and big. They came closer and closer, growing more and more talkative. And he who had ceased to bear a name felt that they would never abandon him until he himself had ceased to exist. Therefore, he begged for mercy, for a respite, a moment in which to reflect; he was shuddering on the confines of the hour and of awakening knowledge, aware that the man who has seen this vision, whose breast has been torn open, is lost to life.

Suddenly there was a light in the room, although whence it came could not yet be discovered. Jost stammered and held out his arms in the direction of the bed. The child rose slowly to her feet, unwrapped the blanket, and came towards the two men, nude and erect. She was smiling. Her white skin was illumined from within. It was her heart that sent this glow through her body, and soon the two men could see nothing but her heart: a sparkling, throbbing ruby, gleaming in shadow like a figure in a rose window.

Jost fell on his knees, fumbling behind him with his hands as if seeking the protective clasp of the many hands about him. "Oh, child!" he sobbed aloud; "oh, woman! Whither goest thou with the flaming jewel in thy breast? Speak to us; speak to all mankind. Tell us that the flaming red kernel is seen but once, that only once ripens the luminous fruit. Only once for each of us. Speak its meaning but this once. They know not what it means. Speak but this once. Speak, thou divine being! Speak, sweet spirit!"

But the child merely smiled. Smiled and passed beyond.

To the Almighty Ruler, before His eternal throne, came the Archangel Michael in the morning of the roaring spheres, and spoke:

"I have vanquished the soul of the indifferent, O Lord."